

مكتبة الشارقة



Window on Jordan

By Ibtisam Awadat
Special to The Star

"I USE the tunnel to meet my friends because it's near the gate of the University of Jordan, and at the same time it's so close to buses," said Hiam, a University student sitting in the pedestrian tunnel. "Many of the students use the tunnel as a meeting point, especially in winter as it protects us from rain and if we are late, we can take any bus and go home," Hiam added. "Tunnels are built to lower the injuries and deaths caused by traffic accidents, but sometimes people use them in negative ways. In front of the Housing Bank Complex as you step into the tunnel, you are welcomed by an old heggar sitting

with her child asking for charity. It's not only this: the woman grabs pedestrians from their clothes and lets go only after they give her money. "We couldn't take it any more so we asked those responsible to take her away," complained a shop owner near the tunnel.

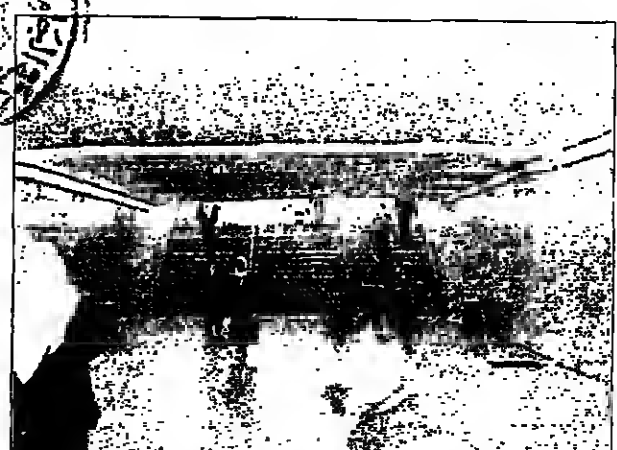
While in Zerga, tunnels are used for other purposes. The entrance which connects the buses complex to Al Sa'adeh Street for instance, is still covered by candidates' photos of the last parliamentary elections. It had taken place but the photos had not.

Then after you come downstairs, a young man meets you and presents you with an excellent offer, he says "I can tell you about your weight

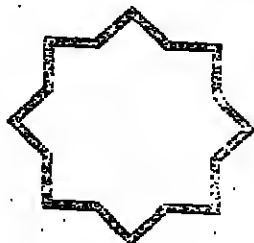
using this electronic scale only for 30 fils. But to busy approaches, besides the man next to the scale. Two young men sat down talking and laughing as if they were sitting in a restaurant although the crowds were coming in and out, but this didn't prevent them from going on with their conversation.

On the other side of the tunnel two scruffy-looking children stood selling their petty merchandise of pictures, tissues and other simple items. Before we leave the tunnel, interesting paintings are hung on the walls. "The paintings were given to the Zerga Municipality as a gift from the pri-

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The Star



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اسبوعية سياسية مستقلة

Government ready to send draft laws restricting PAs and political parties

By Raed Al Abed
Star Staff Writer

THE OPENING this week of the 13th Jordanian Parliament has not put an end to the political tug-of-war between the government and the opposition parties, most of whom had boycotted the November elections. The opposition claims the country is still going through a critical phase that is adding strain to Jordan's eight-year-old democratic experiment. Opposition figures have accused the government of executing a gradual program to reverse the democratic gains of the past few years.

That reversal, they say, began with the amendment last May of the press law resulting in the closure of 14 weeklies and in introducing new regulations to curb press freedom. Now it is the turn of political parties and professional unions, who spearheaded the boycott campaign of last month's elections.

The government has said all along that it wants to "modernize" legislations and His Majesty the King has repeatedly hinted that he will ask the government to review laws governing the activities of political parties and professional unions.

In his Speech from the Throne last Saturday, the King announced that the government will present to Parliament "new legislations that aim at developing the political parties and professional unions...in order to guarantee better performance and to regulate practices...to protect the rights of the people and the interests of these new laws." In addition to these new laws, the government will present a new election law and will ask Parliament to endorse the temporary press law.

The King's speech was the first real indication that the government has embarked on a plan to review the performance of political parties and professional unions and their respective laws. Official sources

revealed that the government is working on draft laws to strongly regulate the existing 18 political parties and 12 professional associations.

Concerning professional associations, the King suggested several times recently that by-laws making membership of these associations mandatory should be revoked. The King is concerned with two controversial issues: drawing the line between politicizing the unions and addressing professional concerns on one hand, and mandatory membership of these unions, on the other.

The associations, with a combined membership of over 80,000 today, have been active players in the political arena for over 30 years—especially since the suspension of political parties back in the 1950s. They were seen by people as natural substitutes for political parties offering a platform for political activists. Attempts by the government in the past to depoliticize professional associations by intervention had largely failed.

The only remaining option is to amend the law to effectively ban these associations from getting involved in politics or expressing political sentiments. Of the 12 main associations, half are controlled by the Islamists while four are in the hands of leftists.

The draft law concerning professional associations is believed to be ready to be dispatched from the Prime Ministry to the Lower House. While no details are available, it is expected the draft law will make membership of the associations voluntary. A more drastic measure could be the appointment of a "manager" to regulate the activities of each association. In addition, the proposed law will separate public sector members from those belonging to the private sector.

In principle, professional associations reject any interference in their affairs. They say they are NGOs and therefore

independent in their internal by-laws, which can only be changed by the general assembly of each association. In addition, they believe that their rights are preserved by Jordan's Constitution and international conventions.

President of the Engineers Association, the largest of the 12 associations, Laith Shihailat, is also one of the most outspoken and controversial figures in Jordan today. He said the government has been planning to dissolve the last of the country's civic institutions, referring to professional associations, for some time now. He said these attempts are made to submit to the demands of "international capitalism...which insist on hitting all groups of workers and professionals."

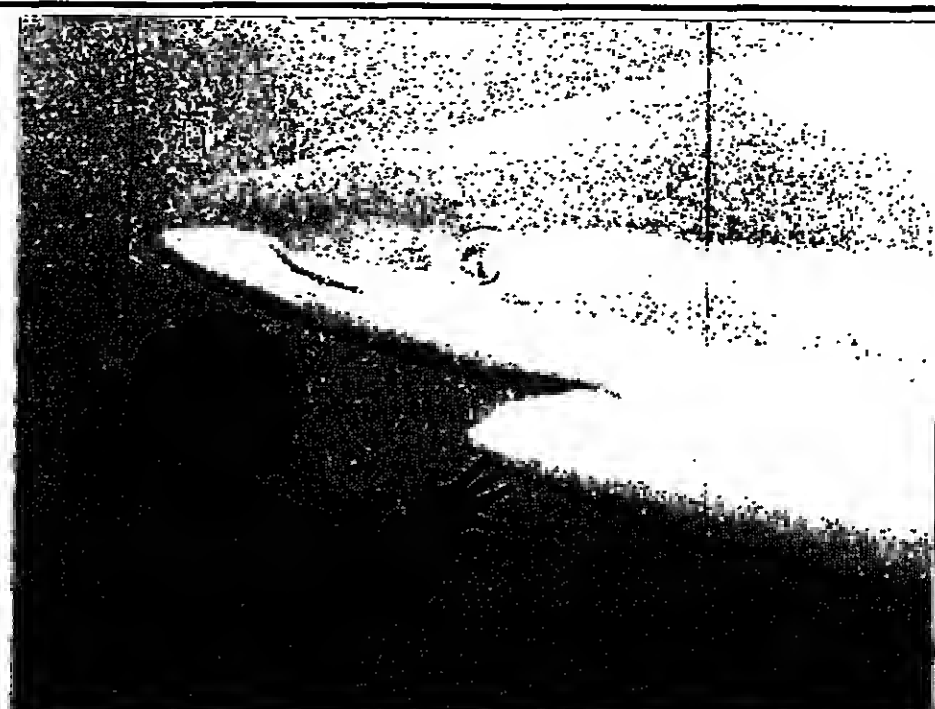
"It is no surprise that this government, which changed its Arab identity and allied itself with Israel...is now trying to destroy professional associations," Shihailat said.

But while some professionals believe there is a need to change the internal by-laws of the associations, they say the change should come from within the professional associations. Dr. Sa'ed Abu Mazer, president of the Dentists Association said that the general assemblies of the professional associations had agreed on several amendments which were later sent to the Prime Ministry, "but they have delayed answering us for many years until today."

Abu Mazer said the government's amendments will negatively affect the profession and the unions.

The 12 PAs are mostly dominated by the Islamists and leftists, who opposes the Jordan-Israeli peace treaty, and stand united against normalization with Israel. They are seen as playing a more effective role in standing to government policies than opposition parties.

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CLOSE ENCOUNTER: Samantha Updegraff, 7, gets up close and personal with a mural of a shark at the National Aquarium in Baltimore in the United States. Her visit is part of a promotion program entitled Aquarium Cares, which helped the aquarium earn a recent National Museum Service Award. Photo by Jed Kirschbaum.

West Bank land hand-over too tenuous to grab onto

By Rebecca Trounson
OCCUPIED JERUSALEM—

At its most basic level, this week's decision by the Israeli cabinet to approve the hand-over of more West Bank land to the Palestinians was significant. Sixteen members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-religious coalition voted to give Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority control over a larger area of occupied West Bank land. Two hard-line cabinet opponents abstained and the government, without a single objection, confirmed Israel's commitment to trading land for peace with the Palestinians.

So why are the Palestinians denouncing the decision as a trick? The Americans, who have been pressing the two sides to make progress, also have been underwhelmed, with the State Department giving the vote only a cautious welcome. Why? Because, in part, the cabinet action, as Israeli commentators noted this week, was a non-decision. The cabinet agreed to a withdrawal only in theory, leaving open the scope, location and timing of the pull-out and linking its implementation to Netanyahu presenting a con-

crete plan for a final peace settlement.

The decision also was couched in tough conditions, with the pull-out contingent on Palestinians fulfilling all obligations under existing peace deals, including greater efforts to fight terrorism and completing a revision of the Palestinian National Charter, a politically sensitive issue that Arafat has been loathe to tackle.

Hard-line legislators such as Human Front of the National Religious Party said openly that they had no doubts about the cabinet vote because they were certain the proposal's conditions were impossible for the Palestinians to meet. Meantime, after months of deadlocked negotiations, relations between the Palestinians and Israel are at a nadir; each side accuses the other of bad faith and systematic violations of the interim peace deals. Four years into a step-by-step process that was intended to build confidence, neither side trusts the other.

Adding to the credibility problems, even as Netanyahu has made his offer to cede more territory to the Palestinians, his government has stepped up construction on

Jewish settlements in the West Bank, creating "facts on the ground" that will make surrendering the land more difficult. Land is the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel has full control over 73 percent of

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Jordanian-Israeli industrial estate faces harsh criticism

Ilham Sadeq
Star Staff Writer

THE LATEST agreement concluded between Jordan and Israel during Doha MENA conference to designate Irbid as a "Qualifying Industrial Zone," is causing much debate among experts.

It is apparent that those who support it or consider it a tremendous achievement are few if compared to those who criticize the pact and interpret it as a bid to encourage the dumping of Israeli products on our market.

As the pact stipulates, only Jordanian products manufactured in Irbid industrial estate are allowed duty free access to the US markets.

Some experts argue that the signing of such an accord, particularly at this time follow a series of sequences after the Wadi Araba peace treaty signed between Jordan and Israel in 1994. But what makes it controversial is that it is approved at a time when Israel is blocking the way for easy trade exchange between Jordan and the Palestine National Authority, though

the Kingdom has signed a commercial agreement with the PNA.

Since 1993, the United States has done its utmost to establish good ties between Arab countries and Israel aiming to stop the Arab boycott for Israeli products and integrate it into the Arab markets.

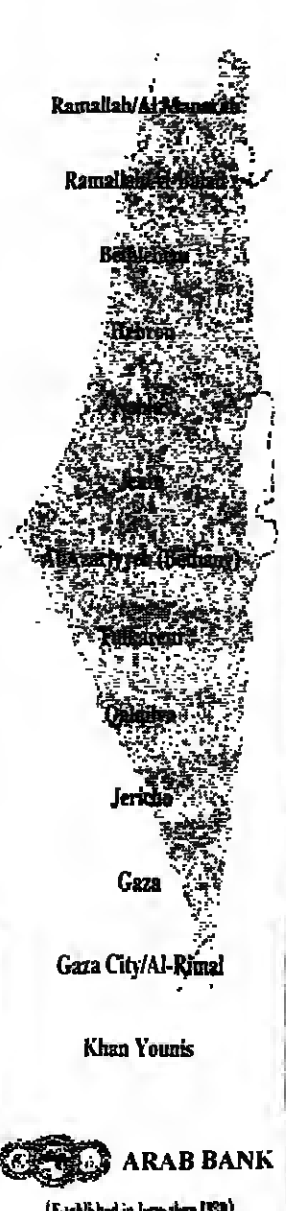
"I believe that designating Irbid as an industrial estate, particularly on the first day of the Doha conference did not come about by coincidence. The US was pushing forward to convert the venue in time despite protests by some Arab countries," says Mr. Ahmad Al Nammani, a prominent economic analyst.

The agreement was described by the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, during the signing ceremony, to "mark a milestone in the implementation of peace and a tangible demonstration of the benefits of peace."

Referring to why was Irbid chosen as a location for the joint industrial estate, Al Nammani tells The Star, "It is because this area is close to the river and

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Caribbean Isles offering cash-and-carry citizenship

By Mark Fineman

ROSEAU, Dominica—The hottest product on the market these days in the cash-strapped resort islands of the West Indies has nothing to do with their sandy beaches or lush volcanic rain forests.

And it doesn't involve their booming offshore industry, which attracts millions of dollars from Americans—ranging from overburdened middle-class taxpayers to Internet casino gamblers—who pour their cash into companies that operate legally here free of most taxes and regulation.

No, the most lucrative item for sale by the governments of these tiny island states, which are struggling to survive in a world with limited foreign aid, is far more basic. It's their nationality.

A mere \$50,000 in cash, for example,

can buy you a passport and lifelong citizenship here in Dominica. The island nation is almost hidden between Guadeloupe and Martinique. But in the last year it has sold 68 passports—for a cool \$3.5 million—to new citizens from points as diverse as Moscow and Miami, Libya and Los Angeles.

It'll cost you \$250,000 to be a Kittitian, up from \$100,000 a year ago—but at least you'll own a house there. The new "Citizenship by Investment" law in the two-island nation at St. Kitts and Nevis requires that amount as a minimum "real estate investment" to get a new nationality.

Most of the other West Indian states offer a range of passport packages that fall somewhere in between.

Why are they doing it?

"It's simple: Our governments need the income," explained Joseph Escher, a Swiss-born offshore financial analyst who heads St. Kitts and Nevis' new International Financial Center. "The time when you could go and beg for money from England or the United States is gone. We've got to have some kind of income to live on."

What's in it for the buyer? The reasons are almost as varied as the nations they come from, most of which permit dual citizenship.

Escher and other offshore analysts said most Americans invest in a second nationality as a way to reduce or avoid US taxes. Wealthy Russian business people invest, they said, principally to keep their global movements and investments secret from immigration officials in Russia, where

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Report

Jordanian-Israeli industrial estate faces harsh criticism

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bridge northern crossing point between Jordan and Israel and its proximity to the Haila harbor which is the main outlet for Israeli exports. This also allows easy movement of goods and manpower from Jordan to Israel.

Sharing Al Nammari's view is Mr. Hani Saadi, an economic expert who also criticizes the agreement seeing it as "a bad deal."

Through the joint Jordanian-Israeli free zone looks "simple and attractive," Mr. Saadi describes it as "risky," and believes "it will strengthen Israeli domination and existence in the region. [They] will provide us with many attractions and incentives to invest in the free zone hoping to reap [most of the] profits," Mr. Saadi points out.

However, he stresses that Israeli capital does not have purely financial targets. "It has many objectives in the long-run, which is to penetrate our markets and economically dominate the region."

While Mr. Al Saadi agrees that investment flows may come to Jordan as a result of these concessions, nevertheless he is wary about the recent signing between Israel and Jordan. He simply wonders "at what cost has the deal been approved?"

However, Dr. Falek Al Fanek, a parliamentarian, seeing such a deal as "profitable." He tells *The Star* "the establishing of the estate will give Jordanian products unlimited access to the American market and without customs duties."

He stresses that it will help to create about 20,000 jobs and reduce unemployment in Jordan. But Mr. Al Nammari looks at it differently. He argues "if we consider exporting products

of the joint free zone to the US as a way to strengthen our competitiveness and lead to many benefits—which are, incidentally nothing compared to high benefits—then we must not ignore the negative effects on local produce and on their international competitiveness."

These risks compared with the expected benefits an industrial zone is expected to bring to our economy, are grave. Many currently operating Israeli factories in Jordan are exploiting Jordanian manpower's crucial need for a job in turn for small allowances to produce goods then export them back to Israel or to Europe.

Besides the exploitation of cheap manpower, there is an environmental issue. "In addition to water depletion, which is scarce in Jordan, I wonder about the size of the harmful effects and pollution that could befall a district that is considered one of the most fertile agricultural areas in the Kingdom," says Al Nammari.

He elaborates that the project could have far-reaching negative consequences for the movement of trade in and out of the Aqaba port, which is vital port to the Kingdom. However, Dr. Al Fanek sees no risk or negative impact on the harbor as a result of building of the zone.

Protest against establishing the Irbid Industrial estate is not only about economic perils. The man in the street feels dismayed and many say they are determined to boycott it.

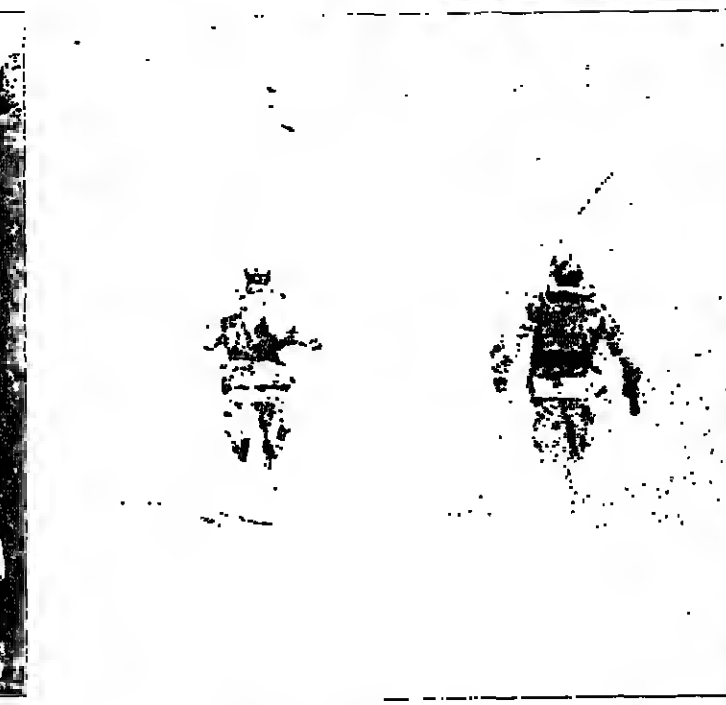
Al Nammari points out that we have to be aware of the damage that such a zone "will have on our brotherly relations with the Arab countries, most of whom are still reluctant to normalize ties with Israel."

AMMAN (Star)—Jordanian and British troops concluded last Sunday joint manoeuvres in the presence of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, HRH Prince Rashid, Field Marshal, Joint Chiefs of Staff Abdul Hafez, Mari Al Kabbueh and Lt. Col. Jim Duttan, Commander of the 40 Commando Royal Marines.

The Abu Obaida Infantry Battalion participated in the live ammunition exercises, in addition to the Royal Commando and the British Marine 40 Infantry Battalion.

The exercises, named Desert Song, and began on 23 October, were conducted on the Tafelch mountains and Qatara. After the exercises, Prince Hassan said "Over many years, the Jordanian Armed Forces have had a very close relationship with the British Army, and I think that these young people come together obviously to learn from each other's experiences." The exercises are the third in the past two years with the British troops.

(Photos by Mahmood Shawkat, The Star.)



Tunnels, a way of creating 'popular culture'

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vare sector in the city, said a shop owner near the tunnel.

Going back to another tunnel in Amman, the children found it a very interesting place to practice their hobby. Yelling on top of their heads. They could only hear the echo of their voices because of the emptiness of the place, but their fun ends when an old man came and kicked them out.

But the same tunnel had a cultural facet recently.

Last September, an artist asked permission from the Greater Amman Municipality to use the tunnel to exhibit his paintings.

I exhibited 34 paintings which discuss the physical changes in the human body," said Mr. Mohammad Al Ameri, the artist of the "first tunnels show" in Jordan.

More than 20,000 people attended the venue. It's the first one of its kind in the Arab region, while it's well-known abroad, the first one was held in Mexico in 1919," added Al Ameri.

After the great success of the first show, the Municipality held a second exhibition for artist Ramzi Al Sayed.

And in this respect, tunnels are being transformed into places of fun and cultural dialogue.

In Amman, we have seven car tunnels and two car bridges while we have six pedestrian tunnels and eleven bridges for people in cross. The total cost of these, as Khaled Sawadha from the Municipality told *The Star*, is JD 13,115,283. The last car tunnel was opened recently in Wadi Al Haddadeh.

Caribbean Isles offering cash-and-carry citizenship

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such information can be sold to kidnappers or extortionists, the business people use their Russian passport only to enter and leave Russia.

Others—including many mainland Chinese and Latvians—carry passports that are either forged or subject to strict visa requirements in the West, the analysts said. Those nationals view their new citizenship as a gateway to the world.

In Dominica, nearly half the island's new citizens are from Russia or other former Soviet republics, according to a review of the country's public records in the year since it began putting its national entry up for sale.

Nearly two dozen others were Chinese or Taiwanese. Another dozen were Americans. The remainder were from Libya, Iran, Canada or Cuba.

So popular is the nationality market that Escher said St. Kitts more than doubled its fee earlier this year.

"The problem is you have 40,000 inhabitants of this country," he said. "And countries like the US give only so many visas to each country. Suddenly, we have 1,000 guys buying passports. There was a fear there would be fewer visas for native Kittians."

There are other potential problems, among them the risk of unwittingly providing havens for international criminals. Most of the islands use

professional services that check potential new citizens with FBI or Interpol databases. But Escher acknowledged that no system is perfect.

"We have some of the most elaborate checks you can imagine to police against money laundering and fraud," Escher said. "But there's no country in the world that can keep the Mafia out."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

West Bank land hand-over too tenuous to grab onto

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the occupied territory and security control in all but 3 percent.

Netanyahu wants to go forward with only one of the promised three-stage troop pull-backs from the West Bank before engaging the Palestinians in accelerated talks on a permanent peace agreement. But the Palestinians have been wary of that proposal, saying they fear Netanyahu is trying to evade obligations in the interim accords, including the troop withdrawals.

Peace Now—an Israeli lobby

group that tracks construction in the communities, which it views as an obstacle to peace—says a recent survey of Jewish settlements reveals Netanyahu's strategy: To strengthen Israel's hold on Jerusalem, expand West Bank settlements and blur the "green line" that divides the West Bank from Israel ahead of final status talks with the Palestinians.

In recent weeks, the government has approved a flurry of permits for new housing on the West Bank, said Peace Now director Moshe Raz.

Overall, Netanyahu's government has approved building about 5,000 apartments in the West Bank since he took office in mid-1996, a pace well ahead of previous governments, Raz said.

On Tuesday, with details of Israeli plans for a troop pull-back and a final settlement beginning to leak out, Israel and the Palestinians jockeyed for political advantage, Israel,

which already has sent officials to Egypt to seek support for its latest proposal from President Hosni Mubarak, dispatched Netanyahu foreign policy adviser Uzi Arad to Washington.

In Washington, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said she would meet with Netanyahu in Paris this weekend. Arafat met with Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul Salam

Majali and sent his deputy, Abu Mazen, to Jerusalem for talks with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy.

But Arafat and Netanyahu, who had what an Arafat aide called a "brief, business-like" phone call Monday night, also kept up a war of words Tuesday. Netanyahu repeated his warning that if the Palestinians unilaterally declare an independent state, Israel will annex parts of the West Bank.

Arafat, who has said he will declare a Palestinian state in May 1999, reacted in dismissive fashion, telling reporters: "It should be clear to everyone that the state of Palestine exists and its capital will be God willing, Jerusalem." He added that he hoped America will push to break the peace talks deadlock, "despite Israeli obstinacy."

The peace talks have been at a standstill since March when Palestinians rejected as



PNA President Yassir Arafat warmly greets Prime Minister Abdel Salam Al Majali during his visit to Ramallah, Tuesday.

far too small a proposed Israeli withdrawal from about 2 percent of the West Bank. The crisis deepened with Israel's decision to launch a new housing project near East Jerusalem and with a deadly series of suicide bombings by Islamic militants last summer. The withdrawal under discussion now—which includes the first and second phases planned under peace accords—may include 10 percent to 12 percent of the territory, Israeli officials said.

Media accounts have said the areas likely to be turned over are outside the cities of Hebron, Jenin and Nablus, which already are under total or predominantly Palestinian control. The pull-back could leave several small Jewish settlements as islands in regions of Palestinian autonomy.

Maps also were being made

final for cabinet discussions, scheduled to start on Wednesday, aimed at coming up with guidelines for final status talks.

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon are both expected to present their ideas to a committee that also includes Netanyahu and Levy. Sharon, the hawkish former general who has muscled his way to a central role in outlining Israel's strategy with the Palestinians, has called for Israel to retain control of parallel "security zones" running nearly the length of the country. Several main roads would link the two zones and Israel would retain control overall settlements, water sources and other interests deemed "vital."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Government ready to send draft laws

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most of whom lack a popular base.

The government claims that professional associations have been more concerned with politics than with upgrading the profession.

Abu Mazar said the political stands of the professional associations are part of the freedom of expression of Jordanians, which is guaranteed by the Constitution. He added that professional associations are naturally concerned with public issues.

The other part of the new legislation will deal with political parties. According to unsubstantiated information, the new draft law of political parties will increase the number of founders needed to form a new party from 50 to 300. It is said that if the party fails to win a seat in Parliament in two successive terms, it will then be dissolved. Another amendment is said to deal with the

government's right to disband the party if any conflict takes place between members of the parliament that lasts for more than a year.

These so-called amendments are still ideas and have not been confirmed," said Ahmad Al Najdawi, spokesman for the Jordanian Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. "But if they turn out to be true, then I believe the goal of the government would be clear: to cancel political parties and formulate them within the official frame work."

He pointed out that since the government has not yet unveiled the draft laws, rumors are spreading. One talks about a paid-up capital for political parties in a move similar to that incorporated into the press law.

Najdawi said if these restrictions are imposed on political parties, then these parties will have "to go underground again and this will not serve the political order in the country."

New clearance measures adopted at points of entry

THE MINISTRY of Finance has issued new instructions to facilitate clearance on items and personal goods brought in by passengers in the Kingdom. These measures became effective as from the first of December.

In compliance with the Customs Law, the value of personal items allowed for clearance will be raised from JD 500 to JD 1000.

Also clearance on some items such as the satellite receivers, cellular and mobile telephones plus accessories, is made on a condition that the passenger brings only one set that is not worth more than JD 300.

Other goods such as TV sets could be cleared according to measures followed at Amman Customs Dept. Description and specifications of all sets should be mentioned in the customs luggage manifest lists.

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JORDAN WEEK

An unconventional report on Jordanian news and views edited by Marwan Al Asmar

Fate of weeklies hangs in the balance
Final ruling by the Higher Court of Justice on the case presented by the eight weekly newspapers contesting the government interpretation of Article 34 of the temporary Press and Publications Law has been postponed yet again. The five-man panel of judges has decided, in its last hearing held Sunday, to send the case to the higher 10-man tribunal of the Higher Court of Justice for a final decision. At the heart of the issue is Article 34 of the Press Law which states that weekly newspapers must have a "registered" capital of JD 300,000. From the start, this point has proved a bone of contention. The weeklies' owners say that they have registered their newspapers at JD 300,000 with the Ministry of Trade and Industry. However, the government said back in August "registration" means that the weeklies have to pay the full amount in total. And this is the issue that the 10-man tribunal will now have to decide upon now. If the judges decide in favor of the weeklies, then they could be back in action after the ruling, that is unless the government introduces new amendments to the law. However owners of weekly newspapers are confident that the tribunal will go in their favor. The government decided to suspend 13 weeklies last September, and then revoked their licenses last month.

Father gets hard labor
Mazen Al Masri, the man who was accused of poisoning his two young children, Hani and Haneen, with cyanide tablets, has been sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor. The panel of judges at the Higher Criminal Court has passed judgement after months of deliberations. They agreed to reduce the sentence from death by hanging to long-term imprisonment. His mother fainted in court when she heard the passing of the sentence. Meanwhile, the Court of Appeal's acquittal of the case of the Honorary Consul of Sri Lanka, Tawfiq Abu Khajil, has been over-ruled by the Court of Cassation. The case will now be sent back to the Court of Appeal for a reconsideration.

Fight for the IAF
The fight for the next General Secretary of the Islamic Action Front has already begun. Presently there are two contenders for the post: Dr. Abdel Latif Arabiyat, considered widely as a dove, and the hawkish Dr. Hamam Saeed. With elections set for 26 November, political pundits say that it could go either way. However, if Dr. Saeed does win, many more moderates on the moderate wing of the IAF are expected to leave.

Demo at poly
The eight-day student strike at the Amman Polytechnic Faculty ended Tuesday. The students have resorted to this action in a bid to improve student services. About 1800 students started strike action, but it was only after police were called to the scene, that the demonstrators were dispersed. Over 20 police vans surrounded that faculty, that is now part of Balqa Applied Sciences University.

Fuel distributors put off their strike
The Fuel Distributors Union (FDU) has decided to put off its strike till the beginning of 1998. The decision comes after the meeting of the Union's General Secretary, Mohammad Al Qaisi with the Minister of Energy, Al Qaisi said the Minister fully understood the Union's demands which call for an increase in the "distribution commission" that gas station owners and gas cylinders distributors receive from the government for providing this service. The FDU wants the commissions increased by another five percent.

Case of dismissed workers
The 35 dismissed workers from the Jordan Spinning and Weaving Factories in Zerqa are still awaiting a final decision on their reinstatement. Earlier, this week, fellow workers walked out and held a rally at the gates of the factory in a show of support to their colleagues. The issue is still being looked into by a committee formed by officials from the Ministry of Labor, Zerqa Municipality, the General Federation of Trade Unions and the employers themselves.

King says important draft laws to be presented to Parliament

AMMAN (Star)—His Majesty King Hussein delivered the Speech from the Throne, Sunday, opening the 13th Parliament. He told deputies that "your very House was born out of the honest determination of the sincere and faithful people of our country. It comes as an expression of the free will of the voters in cities and towns, the countryside and the Badia, and the refugee camps, to become an embodiment of the nation's will."

He said that his government will present to Parliament important pieces of legislation in this coming session. These include legislations to reform political parties, professional unions and the contentious one-man, one-vote electoral system. Minister of Interior Nafih Rashid has already submitted a draft electoral law to be studied by the government which would be then presented to the Lower House of Parliament. The rest of the draft



House of Press and Publications Law, which was issued in its temporary form as a response to a wish from the previous Parliament.

He added, "That temporary Law did not come to limit freedoms or gag mouths, nor did it come to belittle any real achievement by the previous law. Instead it aimed at regulating the press sector, which is from the state to the state and from the people to the people."

Outgoing Pakistani ambassador describes his tenure in Jordan as most productive

AMMAN (Star)—An ambassador's lot is not an easy one. On one level, diplomats may be seen as foot soldiers doing the nitty-gritty stuff to pave the ground for better relations between countries.

For some people, working at improving and developing relations can become a life time pursuit. This very much applies to the outgoing Pakistani Ambassador to Jordan, Mr. Syed Ali Sarwar Naqvi. A true diplomat who began his diplomatic career in his country's Foreign Service as early 1970.

During his tenure in Amman, which began in January 1995, and ends on 11 December, he has constantly sought to strengthen relations further between Pakistan and Jordan.

"I found my posting, both satisfying and productive," he told *The Star*. Indeed, it was a three-pronged strategy. He worked on the political, economic and cultural levels.

In all these aspects progress was made. The ambassador for instance spoke on the bilateral relations between Jordan and Pakistan, and in this respect gave a lecture at the University of Jordan's Strategic Studies



Naqvi

Center in 1996.

Then he spoke on security matters essential for the security of the region, and in particular the problems between India and Pakistan over the issue of Kashmir.

Armed with a BA in Political Science and a post-graduate diploma in International Relations from the Institute of Public Administration in Paris in 1972 and a Masters in International Public Policy from Johns Hopkins in the United States, Mr. Naqvi has served on many international fora, and the United Nations.

In a move to strengthen economic relations between the two countries, a number of trade expos were held in Amman during the past two years.

However, it is in the area of culture that great strides have been made. For one thing, Mr. Naqvi ordered the harem hall of the embassy to be transformed into a cultural arena named Al Qaed Al Azam hall, after the name of the founder

establish greater rapport with it. Already, a number of art exhibitions have been held, one of which was for the Friends of the Dana Village.

This is also what distinguishes Mr. Naqvi. His love for the arts and literature is tremendous, reading such greats as James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner, besides Indo-Pakistani literature that has been burgeoning in English as of late.

In addition to this, he spends his time writing short stories. "This is a bit of a hobby of mine, while others play golf, polo or bridge, I like to read and lose myself in the realm of thought."

But he always makes sure that he balances his hobby with his real diplomatic work. His next appointment is a top position at the Foreign Ministry in Pakistan, where he says, he aims to make relations between Jordan and Pakistan even stronger. ■

P.C.

The state is coming... Netanyahu is going
Columnist Oriah Al Rintawi, also from *Ad Dustour* Arabic daily, wrote about Netanyahu's latest statements rejecting a Palestinian independent state—when the world is remembering the 50th anniversary of the partition resolution (1948).

Netanyahu's rejection came in an interview conducted by a German newspaper. Al Rintawi said the Israeli Prime Minister's rejection was deliberate to provoke western fears as he played on "a possible future alliance between the Palestinians and Saddam Hussein." Netanyahu is playing on "scarecrows" created by the western media.

But Netanyahu and his party, Rintawi added, understand that Palestinian national independence is already accepted regionally and internationally. His obstacles are not of much influence any more.

Had Bibi counted the goal behind the synchronization of the partition's 50th anniversary and the ongoing negotiations which his government is running regarding the second stage of Israeli withdrawal, then Bibi would have understood that the Palestinian national movement is walking on the right path to regain land and build their state.

He added that an agreement on self rule could transitionally convince the Palestinians, but for sure, they will have a Palestinian state, like the rest of the regional countries, one that respects its obligations toward its people.

The writer added that if Netanyahu considered the views of his party, he'll discover that he is croaking outside the flock. Rintawi said even Ariel Sharon, whose hands are still stained with the blood of the children of Sahra and Shatela, realized that the Palestinian state is coming, and many other right-wingers realized this too, besides the left-wing camp too.

Fifty years ago, the creation of the Hebrew state was a moral exit of the West towards Jews—the western story for creating the occupation state.

Now, it seems that the creation of the Palestinian state is an expression of the western moral crisis, too. This is how some European politicians and intellectuals understand Palestinian independence.

The writer added that 50 years ago, the majority of the Palestinians rejected the partition resolution, today the majority of Jews are finding out that there is no way out but to divide.

It is from resolution 181 that the Hebrew state got its international legitimacy, and from the same resolution, the Palestinian state extracts its legitimacy, the resolution puts the foundation for two states not one, the writer believes.

Jordan in the new plan of Netanyahu

Mr. Jihad Al Moumami commented on the new plan of Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu to establish an Israeli security area on the Jordanian-Palestinian borders. In his column, in *Ad Dustour* Arabic daily, Moumami said that it was natural for the Palestine National Authority to reject the project. He suggested that Jordan should have also announced its rejection since the project is another kind of Israeli war on the Arab nation—no less aggressive than settlement expansion.

He said the project is a clear aggression to enforce occupation and to make the PNA accept it.

But the writer believes that creating a border security zone on both banks (of the Jordan River), is a conspiracy. He said that Jordan, which has signed a peace treaty with Israel, is not safe from Netanyahu's conspiracy.

By such action, Moumami said that Netanyahu is planning to end the road on any future unity between the two banks, as the plan does not specify the time of the security zone. The aim, Moumami added, is to make this zone last forever. He warned that this zone will be controlled by the Israeli army, which would then violate both the sovereignty of Jordan and Israel.

He added that then Israel might appoint one of its collaborators as a leader to govern this zone, exactly like the situation in south Lebanon.

A case of the 'Not Me' syndrome

AMMAN — On the 10th anniversary of World AIDS Day, the millions who have died of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) will be remembered. The 22 million people living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in the world are being remembered. By the year 2000, the World Health Organisation (WHO), says this figure will double to 40 million.

The figures for HIV/AIDS in Jordan are nowhere near as dramatic—since 1986, a total of 164 HIV/AIDS cases were recorded, 49 of which have resulted in AIDS-related deaths. But these figures are growing steadily. This year, 28 new cases have already been detected in the country.

HIV/AIDS statistics only reveal the tip of the iceberg, according to Dr. Ziad Najjar, program manager for the National AIDS/STD Control Programme (NASCP) at the Ministry of Health. "Our biggest challenge is to keep this low prevalence of the disease."

Founded in 1986 after the first AIDS case was discovered in Jordan, the NASCP has been educating the public about prevention and providing care and social support. It has also been regularly screening high-risk groups such as carriers of sexually transmitted diseases (STD), intravenous drug users, prostitutes, tuberculosis patients and recipients of blood transfusions.

Figures released by the Ministry of Health indicate that contaminated blood or blood products were the leading cause of HIV/AIDS cases recorded in Jordan, followed by heterosexual contact with an infected partner. However, the Ministry also reveals that an overwhelming 80 percent of HIV/AIDS cases detected in Jordan were contracted outside the country, and that nearly 40 percent of HIV/AIDS carriers were non-Jordanians.

"Jordan is lucky, its cultural heritage has helped control the spread of AIDS," agrees Dr. Omar Suleiman, chairman of the UNAIDS in Jordan, a joint

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Lurie's NewsCartoon



News Item: "Proclamation: South Korea suddenly floated economic vulnerability of major proportions, due to over-extended loans to major corporations by its banks. But, South Korea, who even helped North Korea, now needs help to the tune of \$50 billion!"

Our Say...

On the OIC's agenda

JORDAN WILL be one of the 55 countries participating next week in the meetings of the Organization of Islamic Conference, which will be held in the Iranian capital.

The summit will convene at one of the most crucial phases in the history of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Topping the meeting's agenda will be the Palestinian question and Israel's continued occupation of Arab lands. But other issues will force themselves on the delegates' deliberations, among them the Iraqi crisis and the American military build-up in the Gulf.

The Tehran meeting could not have come at a more opportune time. Iran is going through an exciting political phase where a moderate and open-minded leadership is slowly mending fences with its Gulf neighbors and other world countries. The new Iranian strategy is expected to contribute to the meeting's success by laying out the basis for a new understanding of the Gulf region formulated by the countries of the Gulf. The fact that Iraq will be represented by a senior delegation should pave the way for a much needed Iranian-Iraqi rapprochement and, more importantly, for a much awaited reconciliation between Arab countries and Iraq. To this effect we underline the recent statements of UAE President Sheikh Zayed ben Sultan calling for an end to Iraq's estrangement from the Arab world.

An end to the Iraqi crisis is today an Arab and a Muslim demand. This is the message that the OIC should send to the world, and especially to the United States, which is beefing up its military build-up in the Gulf in preparation for another military strike against Baghdad. Muslim countries cannot afford to ignore this dangerous development at a time when the Iraqi people continue to pay an unacceptable humanitarian price as a result of America's policy of collective punishment.

On the other hand, the collapse of the Middle East peace process as a result of Israeli intransigence and America's flagrant bias in favor of the Zionist state, requires an unequivocal response from the OIC countries. Israeli fanaticism and US insensitivity to Arab and Muslim positions deserve a stern and strong reaction from the Muslim world. That position must underline Palestinian right to self-determination and Israel's total withdrawal from the Occupied Territories including Jerusalem.

More importantly, the OIC must formulate an action plan to offset the unchecked Israeli expansion and territorial control in the West Bank, the Golan Heights and South Lebanon. That plan should include practical steps to revitalize the role of the United Nations and Europe in order to loosen America's grip on the future of this region.

OIC members must agree to deal with these and other challenges if the organization is to enter into the 21st century as a viable alliance of nations with common interests and goals. Additionally, the OIC must provide responses to the cultural challenges that the Muslim world is facing everyday. Islam's image and the rising tide of militancy in the name of religion should also be addressed. Finally, the OIC should transform the goal of economic complementarity and integration at the regional and inter-regional levels from theory into practice. ■

Top Israeli general favors troop pullout from Lebanon

By Rebecca Thomson

JERUSALEM—In a statement that has sparked a furor in Israel and shattered long-held illusions of consensus within the army, a top Israeli general has said he favors a gradual troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon, with or without a peace agreement with Syria, Lebanon's main power broker.

The revelation this week that the commander of Israel's forces in Lebanon, Maj. Gen. Amram Levine, supports a conditional troop withdrawal has changed the terms of the debate over Israel's costly 15-year occupation, several political and military analysts said.

"It means that the idea of a unilateral withdrawal is not a poster child anymore," said Gerald Steinberg, political science professor at Tel Aviv's Bar-Ilan University. "I think it is conceivable now that Israel would actually initiate such a withdrawal."

Levine, the chief of Israel's Northern Command, went public with his views this week after they were leaked, in part erroneously, from a course he conducted for brigade commanders. The furor continued even after Levine explained that he did not

mean an immediate or unconditional pullout.

In a news conference called to clarify his statements, Levine said he believed Israel should first take more forceful action against the Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrillas who are fighting Israel's occupation of a nine-mile-wide swath of land along the Lebanese border.

The aggressive strategy against Hezbollah would then "create a dynamic that will lead to a process where, in the end... it will be possible to bring the army to the international border" without a formal peace treaty, Levine said, choosing his words with care. He said the alternative—delaying a pullout until Syria and Lebanon sign a peace accord—is unacceptable because it means Israel would continue to suffer casualties at the hands of Hezbollah.

Analysts said the statements by the man in charge of Israel's troops in Lebanon were certain to lend credibility to growing calls here for a unilateral withdrawal. They also effectively destroyed the united front Israel's army always has maintained on the issue of the Lebanon occupation: no withdrawal without a peace agreement with Syria, Lebanon's main power broker. ■

Notes from the Levant

50 years after the partition plan, the conspiracy continues

By Osama El-Sherif

AS PALESTINIANS marked the 50th anniversary of the 1947 UN partition resolution for Palestine, Israel announced that it will carry out some form of pullout, or redeployment, from an unspecified portion of the West Bank at an undefined point of time provided the Palestinians remain committed to fighting terrorism. So many ifs and whens coming from a man no one can afford to trust.

It took Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu weeks of political maneuvering and haggling with members of his Likud party and government coalition to come out with his lame proposal. Netanyahu is not interested in appeasing the Palestinians or in complying with agreements he wants to mend relations with the Clinton administration which now blames him for putting at risk US interests in the Middle East.

As it turns out, the size of the proposed pullout may not exceed six percent, eight at the most, of the West Bank. The danger in accepting Netanyahu's latest offering is that it will mean the effective burial of the Oslo and Hebron accords. The Palestinians can throw away their agreements with Israel's former Labor government and with it years of difficult negotiations in search of a just and lasting settlement.

Netanyahu wants to leap over the Oslo accords and move directly into permanent status talks. And as we already know he will not make any new "concessions"; no more land to the Pales-

tinians, no freeze on settlements, no talks over Jerusalem and definitely no independent Palestinian state.

In fact all he wants now is to formalize the status quo. And why not. With resolutions 242, 338, Oslo and its offshoots all dead and buried, Netanyahu is very likely to get away with it. Just as Netanyahu negotiated this last deal with himself, he is now ready to go into final negotiations with or without the Palestinians.

But now that Netanyahu is willing to cough up something, pressure will shift again to the Palestinians, just as it did in the past. For the Palestinians a six percent pullout is only six percent good. It is a far call from the phased out pullout that Israel had committed itself to under Yitzhak Rabin. Under the joint agreement Israel was to freeze settlement activities, release Palestinian prisoners and accept to talk about Jerusalem in the

final phase of negotiations. Today even the controversial Oslo accords are beyond the Palestinian negotiator.

Fifty years ago the Palestinians and the Arabs rejected resolution 181 calling for the establishment of two independent states in Palestine. The resolution also made Jerusalem a city under international administration and marked its borders. While the Arabs rejected the offer, the Jews accepted it. Thirty-three countries, including the then Soviet Union and the United States, voted for the resolution while 13 voted against and 10 abstained. Israel became the first state formally created by an edict from what we now call the international community.

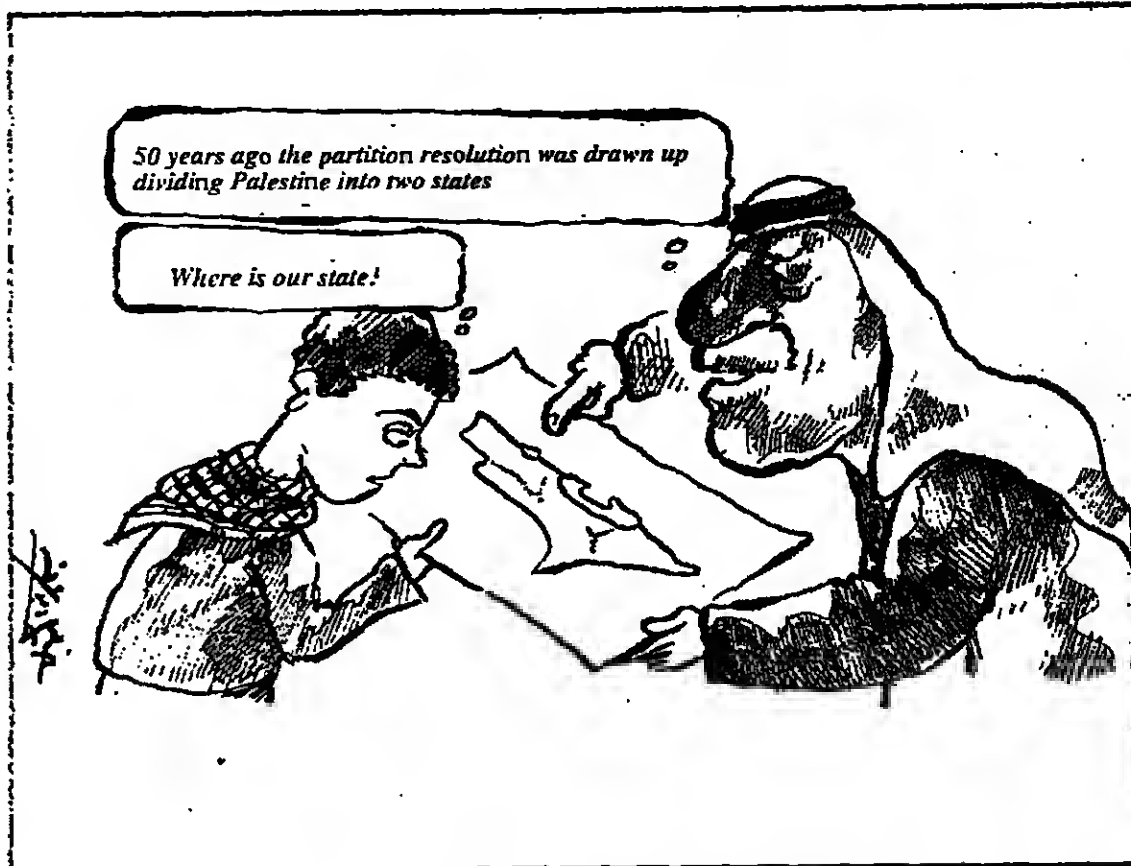
What happened after that is history.

Fifty years later, Israel is in effective control of all of Palestine and the Palestinians have less than symbolic influence over their lives in the

so-called self-rule areas. Today the Palestinian state is no less a reality that it was in 1947 and Jerusalem is the de facto capital of Israel.

It is painful to ponder these realities. It is more painful to see the struggle of the last five decades culminating in a rude Israeli gesture to give back few thousand dunums of land to the Palestinians.

In the midst of Arab divisions, European hypocrisy and American bias in favor of Israel, where should the Palestinians look for help? Arab unity and a common stand remain an elusive goal. The fact of the matter is that the Palestinians find themselves abandoned and with very few friends. They remain the victims of an international conspiracy hatched in the corridors of the United Nations, which gives legitimacy to Israel but denies it to the Palestinians. ■



Jerusalem

Meaning for three faiths

Karen Armstrong's *Jerusalem*, which details the sagas and travails of this city, holy to the three great Abrahamic religions, is a mightily ambitious tome. Its aim is to record Jerusalem's history from prehistoric to current times.

Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths, by Karen Armstrong, Alfred A. Knopf, 1996

Reviewed by Peter Gubser

IN THE 19th century BCE, the Canaanites, early settlers of the West Bank hills, established the town that was to become Jerusalem. They called it "Rushalimum"—similar to the modern Hebrew "Yerushalaim"—a name recorded on vases, dated to the reign of Pharaoh Sesostris III (1878-1842 BCE) and found as far away as Luxor in Egypt. Thus started a long succession of occupations: Israelites, Christians, Muslims, Crusaders, Mamlukes, Ottomans, and modern-day Israelis. Today, as we know, the city is uneasily shared by two national groups, the Israelis and Palestinians, or, viewed from a sectarian standpoint, by three religious groups: Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Karen Armstrong's *Jerusalem*, which details the sagas and travails of this city, holy to the three great Abrahamic religions, is a mightily ambitious tome. Its aim is to record Jerusalem's history from prehistoric to current times. Another of the author's goals is to put herself in the shoes of the adherents of each of the religions. Accordingly, she recounts the events, describes the places, and gives them their religious, if not mythical, importance from a viewpoint that is sympathetic with each of the religious traditions. In each of her tasks, she is on the whole successful; the book makes highly commendable reading. It surely will be a staple on the shelf of anyone interested in the region.

A theme that reemerges time

and again in this Jerusalem story is how important the geographical location and its holy sites became in the traditions of each of the three religions after they lost control of the city and, in turn, how the meaning of Jerusalem grew even more, once the followers of each religion regained the city. This pattern was manifested when the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile in 539 BCE and built the Second Temple; when the Christians reentered Jerusalem in 629 AD carrying the True Cross; and when Salah Al Din, having defeated the Crusaders at the Horns of Hattin, reclaimed Jerusalem for the Muslims in 1187. Loss and retrieval recurred frequently, most recently when Israel conquered the city in June 1967 and the Jews once again could worship at the Wailing Wall.

Another theme that emerges is the great multiplicity of claims, counter-claims, traditions, and myths that the Jews, Christians, and Muslims have with respect to Jerusalem. They have become so ingrained in the writings and imaginations of the three groups that, as the author observes, the believers have considerable difficulty in being objective about the Holy City.

Karen Armstrong, also the author of the noted, *A History of God*, is not a trained historian, the consequences of which are both positive and mildly negative. The material offered the reader is voluminous—over 400 pages of facts, events, beliefs, traditions, and interpretations. On balance this plethora of material is a plus for this reviewer. One does not feel that one belief is being slighted for another. In other words, the

material is there for the reader to deal with, to interpret for her or himself. For some, though, this aspect of the book may denote a lack of discipline or selectivity. Put in other terms, methodology, and sub-themes are not well developed. Essentially it is up to the reader to insert them. Related to this is the author's clear intent to tell the story from the perspective of the believers. To some, this may be a strength. For others, this may be a weakness. They may ask, Where is the secular view or interpretation? Where is the historian's critical analysis?

Her lack of historiographical training also results in occasional omissions that some may deem to be minor errors, but others may contend exhibit a lack of balance in the author's attempt to record history according to the traditions of all three religions. Let me cite three examples. First, in rendering the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son (pp. 26-8), Ms. Armstrong only relies on the Old Testament. Thus, the son in question is Isaac. However, in the Quran, the son in question is Ishmael (Ismail). In a book about the three Abrahamic religions, both traditions should be presented.

Second, the author adopts a Judeo-Christian interpretation of the Quran rather than the most accepted Muslim interpretation when she states that Jerusalem is not referred to in the Muslim holy book (p. 224). She does quote the Quranic passage (17:1) that refers to the "Invisible House of Worship" (the Ka'bah in Mecca) and the "Remote House of worship." But then she accepts the argument put forward by some Jewish

and Christian scholars and theologians that the "Remote House of Worship" cannot possibly refer to Jerusalem because the city is not mentioned by name in the Quran. Most Muslim authorities assert otherwise. To them, the "Remote House of Worship" can only refer to Jerusalem and they cite both the Quran and tradition in their interpretation. In a work such as *Jerusalem*, the author should not take sides with respect to such an explosive and tender issue.

Third, Ms. Armstrong fails the objectivity test when she accepts what are essentially Zionist data on the religious proportions of Jerusalem's population in the 1850-1922 period (p. 352). She unquestioningly accepts figures presented by Y. Ben-Arieh and dismisses quite different Ottoman government statistics for most of the same period. Again, at the least, both sets of numbers should be presented so that the reader can make the judgement. Or, the author could have thoroughly researched the subject and presented her findings. It should be remembered that the Ottomans were the authority of the day. Their data, while perhaps not highly accurate, would most likely be more objective than those of one of the contenders for Jerusalem.

The above criticisms notwithstanding, Karen Armstrong's *Jerusalem* is highly readable and informative. Those who take it up will better understand the interminable problem of Jerusalem. ■

Peter Gubser, author of books and articles on the Middle East, is president of American Near East Refugee Aid, Middle East Insight

Middle East Beat

by Khairi Rami

Iranian dressing

IRAN IS back on the international scene, attracting much attention from foes and friends alike. Fortunately, the mass media is not hatching these days on terrorism, nor are the consequences of a lamphobia, but rather a new Iranian phenomenon: President Khatami. We've started hearing the term "Gorbachevism" with similarities drawn between the former President of the former Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev and President Khatami. Though the nature of both personalities and ideological content of their world outlook are different, only time will tell how one can reach conclusions. Islam is not one party conspiracy, nor an ideology limited to a vanguard elite. Nevertheless, being over-indulgent in proceeding with the wrong assessment is the mark of our time when comes to our neighboring writers.

Still, the tail-end of the year seems to carry plenty of excitement for this neighboring country and its people. Our fellow brothers in Islam, the role of women in society, being openly discussed, culture and the arts are being praised and supported, not to forget of course, the fact that the Iranian national team has qualified for the world cup final. The floodgates of good fortune seem to have opened up, and to top it all, Iran is holding in December, the Islamic Summit which will attract the leadership of the whole Islamic world.

Before we start hearing cynical remarks about small mercies, we might as well be happy for the little progress and grateful for small mercies despite the state of our regional affairs. The great achievement for our Iranian brothers, is that the world press is busy with conclusions and supposed changes, and does not bother with the habitual issues of oppression and persecution. We can all go forward at the end of the day.

The other important matter which influences Iran as well as the whole Islamic world is the Islamic Summit. One does not wish to start making extrapolations based on past experiences, but it is important to emphasize the point that the changes that have shaped our world in the last few years, must be taken seriously into consideration when the Muslim leaders meet to organize the agenda of the Summit. Primarily, do we really have things in common? or more importantly, are we all as Muslims threatened collectively by the enemy from within, or is there really a conspiracy against us?

This final question has been, unfortunately, so overused, that it has become an adequate reason for our inability to act, and our impotence in facing changes as well as reality. Iran at this point, has a great opportunity to affect change, in as much as being effected by it. The recent years of isolation on the international and Islamic scenes may be able to provide it with a new perspective and a new impetus.

The linchpin of this Summit must be based above all, on cooperation. The realism of all of us, belonging to different systems of government and rule, must add positively to the diversity of our composition, and our abilities to be more resilient in the face of challenges, rather than the usual grounds of differences, narrow self-interest, and habitual recriminations.

If Muslims are to meet, then let it be in the spirit of Islam, and in the name of the region that has given to the world, civilization and thought. The options are open in front of the Islamic world leaders, and they can choose to dwell on the various differences of interpretation of policies, but alternatively, they can work on all those elements that require us to cooperate with each other regardless of what may be construed as dogmatic political stands, or unreasonable demands. ■

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Letters to the editor: Will be edited for brevity, must contain name and address of sender.

Business scene

■ The Public Transport Corp (PTC) is expected to be privatized by March, 1999, as its monthly losses are estimated at JD 10,000. Only six percent of commuters use PTC buses. Closing down such a corporation and transferring it to the private sector, according to Minister of Transport, Dr Bassam Al Sakei, will save money and reduce environmental pollution. Workers in the PTC will stop working by March, 1999. The aim is to replace the corporation by two new concerns which will start in April 1999.

■ The UN sanctions committee has approved 14 contracts to export Jordanian commodities to Iraq in the light of the second phase of the oil-for-food deal concluded between the UN and Iraq last year. The new contracts, worth \$34.298 million, allow Jordan to export various products such as detergents, vegetable oil, toilet soap and tea. Thus, total contracts awarded to Jordan during the first and second phases reach \$142.94 million. The Ministry of Industry and Trade is doing much to get approvals on further export contracts.

■ Total assets of the Arab Center for Pharmaceuticals and Chemicals during the first half of this year were JD 7.4 million. This shows a rise of 1.7 percent compared with the same period last year. The center's total sales by mid-year declined by 13.67 percent compared with figures recorded in the first half in 1996. They stood at JD 1.1 million. However other revenues totalled JD 53,000 till mid-1997, generating an increase of 69.6 percent of the same time last year. Pretax profits in the first half of this year reached JD 89,000 making a drop of 14.9 percent against the same time last year.

■ Despite the seemingly flagging number of tourists into Jordan, official figures estimate the generated income at JD 552 million. Next year's plan is ambitious aiming to generate JD 579 million to rise of five percent of this year's earnings. Tourists arriving at Jordan till the end of this year will be nearly 1,320 million, to rise next year by 13 percent to total 1.5 million.

Foreign Exchange
Wednesday, 3 Dec.

	Buy JD	Sell JD
US \$	0.7080	0.7100
£	1.1510	1.1568
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SFr	0.4801	0.4825
FRF	0.1227	0.1233
YEN (100)	0.5624	0.5652
DEL	0.3667	0.3685
LIT (100)	0.0419	0.0421

Small businesses, a way to promote women's productivity

By Ilham Sadeq
Star Staff Writer

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION in the economic development process is today given much attention in the region. The idea is to make women, a more productive element in society. The challenge awaiting Arab women is to change their status in the community from dependence to that of building a pioneer personality. To discuss such an issue, its benefits and obstacles, a three-day seminar was organized on 2-4 December at Le Meridien Hotel (formerly, Forte Grand) by the Noor Al Hussein Foundation (NHF) in co-operation with the International Labor Organization (ILO).

The venue titled a "Regional Seminar on Micro and Small Enterprises, Promotion for Women in the Arab Region" was opened under the auspices of Her Majesty Queen Noor, and is attended by representatives from 11 Arab countries: Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen and Jordan. Also attending are ILO consultants and experts.

Dr Sima Bahous, a senior development specialist in NHF, tells *The Star* "that the importance of the seminar in Jordan focuses on promoting small and micro enterprises comes at a time when Jordan is becoming integrated into the international market." Consequently, she adds that it is a must for women to achieve more integration and contribution to economic development in society and be able to run their own businesses. However, women face traditional barriers that do not give them the chance to have easy access to the market. She points out that small size enterprises are becoming a global trend rather than a local or regional one. Such encourages the private sector to play a more active role in society. "There is a global tendency to change the conventional role of governments from providing finance for services to sharing this mission with the private sector," Dr Bahous says. The co-sponsor, the ILO, holds for the first time such a seminar to support women on the regional level. "Our objective is to get Arab



HM Queen Noor attends opening ceremony, Tuesday

polymakers, representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector together, to encourage exchanging experiences in the field of micro and small business enterprises, and to establish a communications network and

initiate dialogue among the various parties involved in the development of such undertakings," says Dr Mary Kawar, specialist on women workers in the Arab region. However, she tells *The Star* "that till now most projects on women-run business adopted by the Noor Al-Hussein Foundation could not be called small or micro enterprises. Rather, most of them are linked to simple handicrafts that are mainly income generating enterprises. "We should differentiate between career development and poverty elimination," Ms Kawar adds.

Some women do have the will to run their own businesses, but because they are unable to secure the finance, they resort to other agencies for loans necessary for such projects. "It is true that through these so-called small 'services projects,' the foundation has contributed to reducing the level of unemployment and eliminate poverty," says Ms Hind Abdul Jabbar, director of women's projects in NHF. But, this is not her target. "It is imperative to establish a sustainable project that won't close down or end when the finance stops. What distinguishes the seminar is that it is not organized around speeches but rather it is convened in such a way to

make the representatives meet face to face in exchange and discuss issues involved in the field of small and micro enterprises for women, conduct workshops to highlight obstacles facing implementation and guarantee the continuation of enterprises. Workshops organized deal with problems by donor agencies, training, credits and marketing. "It is not enough to help the woman to start-up her own business, first of all she must be trained to manage her business, till it becomes productive," adds Ms Abdul Jabbar who is also the president of the Women Business and Professional Club.

Also, Businesswomen must be fully aware of marketing, accounting, pricing, revenues and others. Ms Kawar points out to an important factor that should go parallel with the enhancement of women's role in society. "It is necessary to create legislations that prohibit oppression against women or eliminate discrimination against them in the Arab region," she says.

The participants are doing their best to come up with ways and means of creating an environment for regional cooperation in promoting small and micro business enterprises for women. ■

Siemens launches first 'thinking' Mobile

THE SIEMENS "S15," Siemens has launched its first "thinking" dualband mobile phone. This very handy device is equally at home with GSM900 (D networks) or GSM1800 (E networks), and switches automatically between the two—provided the network facilities are available. As one of the handiest and best-equipped mobiles on the market, the S 15 even features a built-in calculator. The new-comer, which will be of particular interest to the cross-border traveller, also offers facilities for exchanging short messages (SMS), faxes and data, whilst "on the move." This state-of-the-art dualband mobile will be available from the beginning of next year.

The Siemens S 15 is one of the first high-end mobiles on the world market to make "sophisticated" use of both the D and E networks, whilst combining handy design, convenience and staying-power. The high-resolution display enables the selection of up to 250 names from the telephone directory. There are facilities for calling back the last 10 callers simply by pressing the appropriate key, and the user can also see at a glance the network via which the call is being routed.

The S 15 switches from one mobile radio network to the other by means of fully automatic "seamless handover." By using the "roaming" facility between network operators, the globalizing E-network subscriber can, for example, even make cross-border phone calls, thus remaining constantly available by telephone, even if he is in a country that has no E network provision. To switch between networks, it was previously necessary to change telephone card (and mobile) in most cases.

With the S 15 on the other hand, the traveller cannot only make use of his "home" network, but, thanks to the "roaming" feature, can also readily enjoy the facilities of other GSM networks abroad, whilst retaining the same telephone card, phone number and account. In addition, the user enjoys capacity advantages and thus improved availability

from networks which also employ GSM 1800 in combination. Since dualband facilities with "Seamless Handover" allow the network operator even better capacity management. In addition, the introduction in future of innovative network services will further increase subscribers' capacity requirements, to levels that only dualband devices can properly meet.

The S 15 incorporates the latest dualband technology, featuring the Siemens Semiconductors "HIGOLDplus" chip-set, which delivers more computing power, for greater operating convenience, for fax and data transmission too. The modest power requirements

give the user several days of mobile use without the need to recharge or change the battery, and all in a compact (142 x 53 x 19-24 mm) and lightweight (180 gram) package.

There is the option of four different battery formats, including the standard model for up to 75 hours of standby operation or 3 to 4 hours talk time, as well as a battery with a built-in vibrator-alarm, lithium-ion batteries and high-performance NMH batteries with capacities of up to 1800 mAh, offering the user power for some 200 hours of standby operation or around 10 hours talk time without the need for recharging. ■

China's runaway growth slows

By Steven Mufson

BEIJING—China's breakneck economic growth appears to be slowing down, just as the rest of Asia is grappling with currency and stock market crises.

From idle factories in Sichuan to the sparse crowds at pricey retail stores in Shanghai, from disappointed farmers in northern China to anxious textile exporters in the southern city of Shenzhen, it looks like China's red hot economy is cooling off. Although at least one billboard urges Chinese to "Raise high the banner of Deng Xiaoping thought," most signs on top of buildings proclaim: "space for rent."

To be sure, cooling off in China is a relative term. Over the past six years, China's economy has grown at a blistering pace of about 11 percent a year. China's economy this year is expected to grow about 8 percent.

But as Asia's currencies and stock markets collapse like dominoes, the slowing of China's economy is making policymakers and investors wonder: Will China be next?

Many analysts and investors are worried that slower growth will expose the flaws in China's economic miracle: the troubled banking system, the

money-losing state-owned enterprises, a real estate bubble and vulnerability to intensified competition from Asian neighbors.

"The Southeast and East Asian nations underlying financial crises are all characterized by the combination of initially overvalued currencies, significant external debt, and weak banking systems," said Nicholas R. Lardy, an economist and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

For now, Lardy and others say, China appears to be well-insulated against the shocks that have hit the rest of Asia in the past month. China's currency is not convertible, so people cannot withdraw their money and cannot get against it on currency markets. Moreover, most of China's investment is direct investment in real estate and factories, and most of those companies are here for the long haul. China's \$116 billion in external debt is mostly long-term.

In addition, China is holding about \$130 billion in reserves, a powerful war chest for fending off speculators who might try to attack the currency of Beijing's recently retrieved jewel, Hong Kong. Nonetheless, investor con-

cerns have rattled Chinese and Hong Kong markets this week. Shares of Chinese companies on the Shanghai and Shenzhen exchanges tumbled to new lows for the year. The Hong Kong exchange's index of "red chip" companies connected to China sank to less than half its peak just five months ago.

"People are getting worried about the Chinese economy because all the Asian economies are in trouble and China in a way has been excluded from the turmoil," said Marleen Yau, a Hong Kong-based analyst of red chip companies for Bear Stearns & Co. "Given that all Asia is in trouble, how can China stand alone?"

"Moreover," Yau added, "the numbers are actually getting less optimistic. It looks like the (Chinese) economy is slowing down...so people are worried that next year for China will be tough."

Some of the disturbing numbers include: Chinese inventories that ran at more than \$71 billion, equal to nearly 8 percent of the gross domestic product; stagnant disposable income in the countryside; and a commercial real estate glut that shows no sign of abating in Shanghai and Beijing. Many state enterprises are slashing prices to boost sales. Wentong Carpet Co., a state firm in Henan Province, just cut prices 50 percent, and said it will accept installment payments. "Call us and we will be at your doorstep," it says in an ad.

Some analysts caution against exaggerating China's difficulties. "It's getting very difficult to read, very busy, but I do think people have turned overly gloomy about the whole thing," said Joe Zhang, an economist with Credit Lyonnais. A former official at China's central bank, Zhang says China's economic problems haven't to be much worse. "Things haven't changed dramatically," he said. "The reason people have become so pessimistic is that the external environment has changed."

This week, President Jiang Zemin didn't even mention the economy in a speech at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Vancouver. "They're invulnerable at the moment," says Lardy. "The question is, will they use this time to address the underlying problems or will they continue with business as usual."

Lardy points particularly at the country's banking problems. "By several indicators, China's banking system is at least as fragile as those of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia or South Korea," he said. As a portion of gross domestic product, Chinese banks' reserves are less than half as large as those of Japan's troubled banks, Lardy said. Sometimes, China's leaders seem aware of the economic dangers. Before leaving for Vancouver, Jiang delivered a speech to Chinese bankers. In addition to Jiang's unusual appearance at such a meeting,

view, Shanghai Mayor Xu Kuangdi compared his city's construction boom and office glut to a poor person who buys clothes a little too big. Pointing to his sleeves, Xu says "you make them a little too long and maybe next year the clothes will fit."

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more than half the Communist Party Standing Committee attended, including Premier Peng, Vice Premier Zhu Rongji and the head of the Central Party School, Hu Jintao.

After the meeting, a two-page editorial in the *People's Daily*, the official party newspaper, warned, "The financial system has yet to adapt to the demands of a developing socialist market economy. The financial system is not sound. Financial supervision is weak, financial order comparatively confused, and financial crimes are rampant."

The leadership also was worried enough about the slackening economy to cut interest rates to stimulate demand recently just as other governments were jacking up rates to protect their currencies. "This economy is full of problems, and reform takes a long time to fix all the problems," said Fan Gang, an economist and director of the National Economic Research Institute. But he added that a perfect economy is inconsistent with fast growth. "That is our reality," Fan said. "Developing countries always take risks. Without them you can never catch up."

The Arab Bank continues to offer its advanced banking services

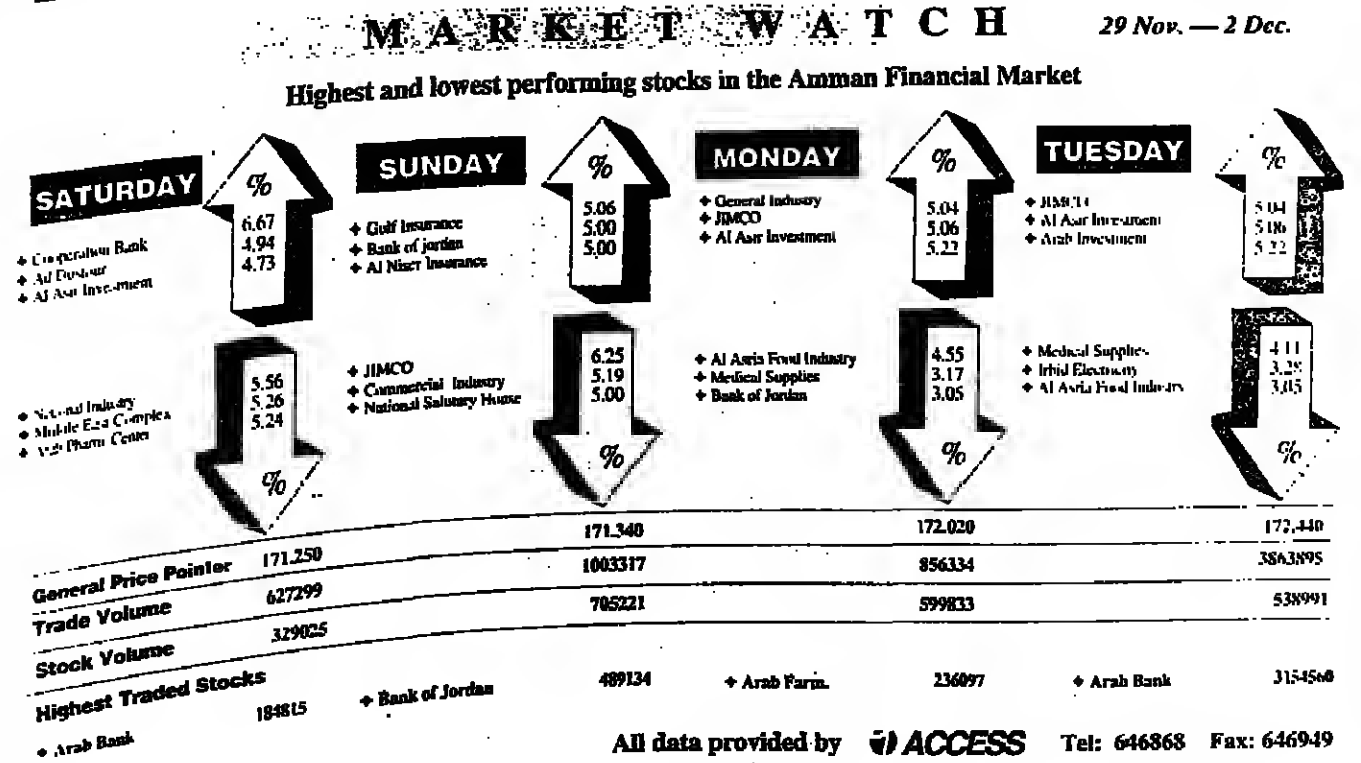
THE ARAB Bank continues providing advanced information technology services for its clients. After the introduction of new services on its Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), the number of which is now 55 in Jordan, the Bank opened the machines (ATMs) to Visa and Plus cards, in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. This move would allow 600 million Visa/Plus cardholders to use these ATMs to withdraw cash through the Visa network. The Bank also is working towards linking other branches' ATMs in Egypt, Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar and Yemen. Moreover, the Arab Bank ATMs are already linked with local networks in Cyprus and the Gulf (UAE, Qatar and Bahrain). The Bank is currently expanding its ATM network to acquire local and international cards, and has

already started installing colored and modern machines at some branches, supermarkets and Queen Alia airport.

The Bank has issued recently Visa Electron cards for the UAE customers and will issue them shortly in Jordan for ATM cardholders. This card can be used as an ATM card in the country of issuance, and for withdrawals on 350,000 ATMs all over the world. In addition, it is used for purchases locally and internationally at merchants equipped with Point of Sale machines, the number of which at present is one million. The Arab Bank Visa Electron card is a photocard with a unique design and colour.

The Arab Bank is considered as a pioneer in Jordan and in some Arab countries as it has introduced advanced self-services such as the ATM.

PhoneBank. PC Corporate Banking and Visa cards. The client can use the telephone to inquire about his balance and account transactions and request them by fax, e-mail, checkbook and a bank statement or make transfers between accounts and convert sums from foreign into local currency. PC Corporate Banking Service allows access to all customer's accounts directly to obtain similar services. The Arab Bank Visa Card (Classic and Gold) enables its holder to purchase from about 13 million merchants/service centers worldwide or to withdraw cash from Visa International ATMs, while the Gold Card entitles its holders to insurance privileges and emergency services. ■



Global warming gives Maldives a sinking feeling

Despite the slow pace of efforts to combat the greenhouse effect, some Maldivians, such as Ali Rilwan, see a measure of hope. There may be a lot of idle chatter by the industrialized nations about global warming, Rilwan says, but it's a start

By Dexter Filkins

THULUSHDHOO, Maldives—In this nation of sandbars, global warming is not some dry idea best left to the scientists. It's death by drowning.

Eighty percent of the Maldives, a sparkling sweep of 1,180 islands in the Indian Ocean, sits less than three feet above the water's surface. That means that under some of the more credible scenarios for rising sea levels, the entire nation could vanish. Atlantis-like, into the sea.

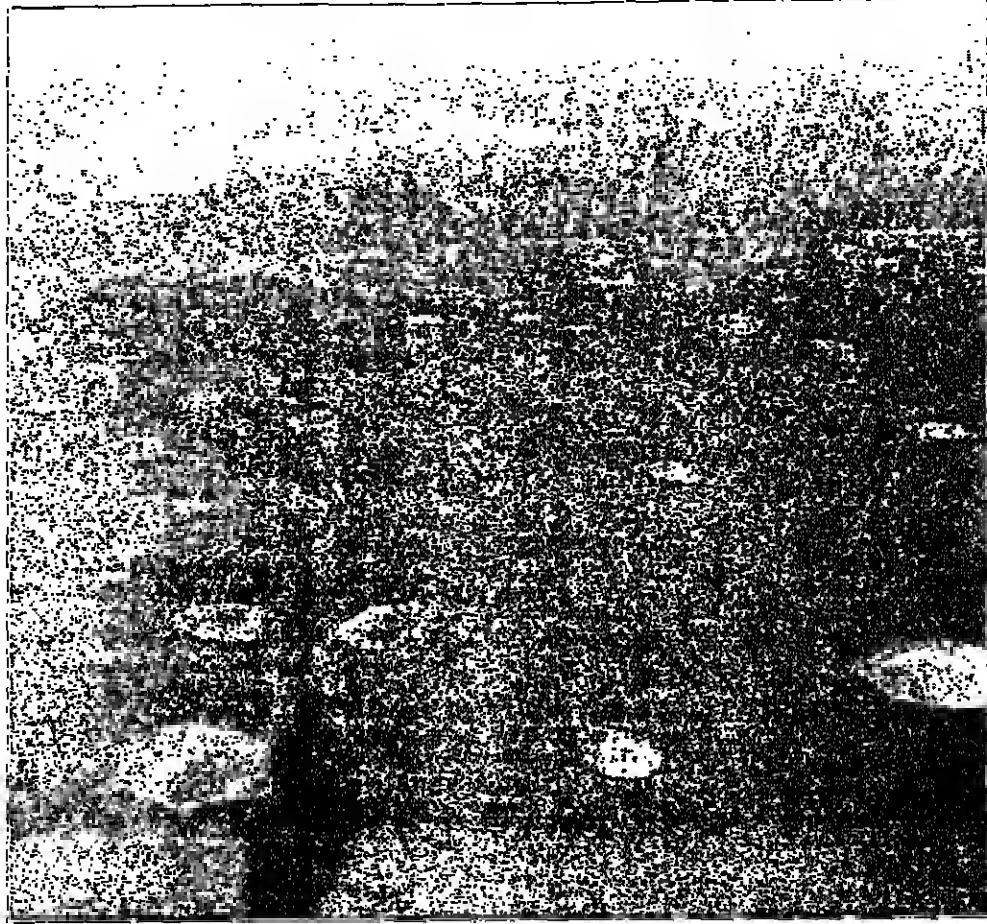
"We could be environmental refugees," said Hussain Shihab, the Maldives' former minister for environmental affairs. "If nothing is done, our country could be underwater sometime in the future."

The fear has penetrated the consciousness of this nation of 263,000 people, spurring talk and action of an intensity unseen in the West. And it has created a deep sense of frustration, that a nation of fewer than 10,000 carbon-dioxide-emitting automobiles could be in peril from consequences it cannot control.

As representatives of about 150 nations gather next week in Kyoto, Japan, to negotiate cuts in the output of the heat-trapping gases linked to global warming, few countries carry more urgent pleas than the 30 small island states of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans.

For each country—the Maldives, the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Fiji and others—on a small rise in the world's sea levels could mean not just washed-out sea walls and eroded coastlines but national catastrophe and even extinction.

"We are not responsible for this problem, but we are the first to feel its effects," said Abdulla Mohamed, the Maldives' deputy



Nations ambassador from Samoa, a nation of islands in the South Pacific. "We are facing a Goliath."

With the most to lose, the small island states are pushing for the sharpest reductions in greenhouse gases. While the U.S. has proposed that industrialized countries begin in 2008 to reduce emissions to 1990 levels, the 35-nation Alliance of Small Island States is pushing for a 20 percent cutback from 1990 levels by 2015.

"We don't think that's unreasonable," said Abdulla Mohamed, the Maldives' deputy

minister for the environment. "This is a matter of life and death for us."

While the exact nature and timing of the threat probably won't be clear for years, island countries such as the Maldives have every reason to worry. A five-year study by the International Panel on Climate Change, a group of top researchers from 25 countries, predicts that by 2100, sea levels could rise anywhere from 6 inches to 3 feet.

If the high-end forecast comes true, most of the Maldives would be swallowed by the ocean. Even the mid-range estimates—a rise of 20 inches—would devastate the Maldives, wiping away some islands, shrinking others, changing the shapes of still more.

Strung out across 550 miles in 26 atolls, most of the Maldives take up less than a square mile. Few have sea walls. Many of the islands, too small for permanent populations, serve single purposes. One island, for instance, is dedicated to oil storage. Another holds a prison.

At Male International Airport, an island unto itself, the ocean laps both sides of the runway. Touching down there in a commercial airliner gives the sensation of landing on an aircraft carrier.

Residents of the Maldives say they have already noticed that their climate—two barely perceptible seasons of sultry winds and soggy monsoons—has already begun to turn.

Two catastrophic storms in the past decade caused more damage than any in recent memory. In 1987, one-third of Male, the Maldives' capital and most populous island, was underwater. In 1991, the runway was submerged and strewn with coral boulders, and the airport closed for three days. Dhuvandhoo lost 1,000 feet of beach. Hurugandu, for a time, submerged completely.

"We never had storms like that 30 years ago," said Aminu Fuluhi, 60, a resident of Thulusdhoo. "You cannot predict the weather anymore."

The islands have begun to prepare for the worst. While total submersion of the Mal-

dives would take a century or more, the consequences in the meantime would be grave. So with the help of a \$30 million grant from Japan, the Maldives is building a 9-foot-high concrete wall around Male to protect it from another big storm. Other islands have already been ringed with breakwaters. The government has banned most coral mining because the stony skeletons act as a natural barrier.

Just as visible here is the government's campaign to make sure the citizens know about rising sea levels—and who's causing them. Teachers in the oceanfront Kalaafaanu School, where salt and sand just the hallways, teach their youngest students about global warming. Television Maldives, the nation's only channel, and the Voice of Maldives radio, hammer home the consequences of the greenhouse effect.

Even residents with little formal education can ramble on about the issue.

"The sea levels are rising because the snowcaps are melting due to the smog and pollution created by the rich countries," said Ahmad Nizar, a 42-year-old tuna fisherman who never went to school. "Factories, cars, we don't have those sorts of things." Several residents expressed dismay at the Clinton administration's proposal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels beginning in 2008. But some said they understand the difficulties in asking people to make do with less.

"The world will have to limit economic activity if we want to prevent a disaster," said Abdul Azeem, 40, a tuna fisherman on Thulusdhoo. "But that is not going to happen, because every country, rich or poor, wants more than that."

Despite the slow pace of efforts to combat the greenhouse effect, some Maldivians, such as Ali Rilwan, see a measure of hope. There may be a lot of idle chatter by the industrialized nations about global warming, Rilwan says, but it's a start.

"Ten years ago, we couldn't get anyone interested," said Rilwan, an environmentalist on Male. "Now, at least we've got their attention."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Donations made in Diana's memory still pouring in

By William D. Montalbano

LONDON—Tears for the death of the world's favorite princess have dried, the great sea of flowers is a memory, but a growing pool of cash donated in the memory of Princess Diana has become an overwhelming reality.

Three months after Diana's death, the money still is pouring in. It is creating a star-in-the-making among British charities but presents her survivors with an enormous organizational headache.

"We couldn't have imagined how much would come in, and we still don't know what the total will be," said Vanessa Corringham at the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund. "At the start, we were getting thousands of letters a day, and now we are still receiving hundreds each week."

With more than 140,000 individual donations received, nearly \$60 million is on hand or en route, with plenty more on the way—but not a penny will be distributed before next spring. No decisions have been made on the nature of the fund or its eventual beneficiaries. Decisions will come slowly.

"It is so big, so important, so emotional that more than ever one has to demonstrate due diligence and complete transparency. We must be whiter than white," Corringham said.

The fund will probably become an endowment, which will generate income for grants to groups that carry out good works. Certainly it will give to charities favored by Diana but perhaps to others as well. Such key decisions will be made only as the roster of fund overseers is gradually filled.

So far, there are only three trustees: Michael Gibbins, Diana's private secretary; Anthony Julius, her lawyer; and Lady Sarah McCorquodale, one of her sisters.

The board will grow to about a dozen members when new appointments are announced at year's end. All trustees will have been in some way close to Diana.

For now, the fund is being administered by Mishcon de Reya, Julius' firm of lawyers, in a no-frills operation with low administrative costs. Corringham said that when a full-time staff is hired, it will include several people who once worked for Diana.

The current account shows



about \$22 million in individual and corporate donations, with \$34 million en route from the first royalties for Elton John's musical tribute "Candle in the Wind." The British government also will chip in about \$4 million in sales tax rebates from the John CD.

Much more—perhaps \$50 million—will flow from "Candle," and another seven-figure bonanza is expected from a Memorial Fund-sponsored commemorative CD—Pavarotti to U2—that goes on sale in the United States this week.

Promising to share revenues with the fund in exchange for the use of Diana's name on their products, several hundred companies are marketing goods from porcelain dolls to Christmas cards with the tacit approval of Diana's heirs.

How much global licensing may produce is anybody's guess, but already several dozen British companies have been told by Diana's lawyers to put their overdue contribution checks in the mail, according to Corringham.

If the fund fulfills early predictions of \$300 million in assets, and if it preserves capital and distributes its income as grants, it will rank in the top 15

among Britain's 180,000 registered charities, according to Vicki Pulman at the Charities Aid Foundation.

Noblesse oblige, doing good works for charity, is a principal function of Britain's royal family. After her divorce last year, though, Diana cut her patron role from more than 100 charities to a handful.

Thereafter, she was official patron for groups fighting leprosy, AIDS, cancer and homelessness. She also supported a London children's hospital and the English National Ballet. In addition, Diana emerged as a leading international advocate for the abolition of land mines in the months before her death and remained close to mainland charities such as the British Red Cross.

While Diana's causes will benefit from the spontaneous donations triggered by her death in an Aug. 31 car crash in Paris, there will be many other outstretched hands.

Charity professionals who are closely watching to see how the fund develops do not envy its birth pains.

"I think I would have many sleepless nights," said Eoin Redahan at Action Research, which funds medical research projects. "They are going to need good experts to advise them. And in the end, they will have to make decisions popular with some people and unpopular with others."

Action Research uses 2,500 medical advisers to vet projects, forwarding those that seem worthwhile to panels of scientific experts, who then make recommendations to the group's trustees, who finally decide which to support.

"It will be especially difficult to allocate the Diana fund money," Redahan said. "On what basis do you decide, for example, whether to give money to a play group looking after children with a disability or to a doctor working to eliminate that disability?"

Michael Dickson, the director of London-based Whizz Kidz, which provides wheelchairs and other support to disabled children, saw his agency bumped by the Diana fund as a major beneficiary of the spring London Marathon. But Dickson, who has written a book on British charities, believes that organizers of the Diana fund deserve praise as a measure of sympathy.

"They need time to get the structure sorted out, and deserve a jolly good bit of peace and quiet," Dickson said. "Getting the money was the easy bit. Now they have to give it away responsibly with the world's press watching. I imagine yourself on a panel funded by requests for money. Half the world will be at their within a year."

To the beleaguered handful of fund workers, it seems that way already.

"Thousands of ideas flood in from everywhere to use Diana's name to sponsor fund-raisers—ten parties in Llandudor, flower arranging in Bogotá," Corringham said.

Only one company, a British crystal maker, has signed a formal contract with the fund so far. Like the many others, it has tacit approval to use Diana's name, it passed trustees' tests for good taste.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

ROCK TRACKS

By Stacy Jenel Smith

Tom Petty's just-finished 20-show stand at San Francisco's famed Fillmore ballroom has drawn lots of questions. Is Petty workshoping new material? Taping something? Does he have plans to move on to other venues? No, no and no. Word is, he just wanted to get out and play, recharge his creative juices, and do it away from the L.A. area. Tom and The Heartbreakers played different set lists every night, sprinkling in music ranging from blues to country to ... surf music. Petty also had guest artists in to add to the fun, including Carl Perkins and John Lee Hooker. His opening acts included Jakob Dylan's The Wallflowers—who've gotten so hot they're certainly now in headline land. The shows were all sold out, with a hefty celeb contingent including the likes of Winona Ryder, Jackson Browne, and Counting Crows member Dave Bryson showing up to catch the intimate shows.

Look for Tania to finally come out with her debut album this summer, near the 4th of July release of "Speed2," in which the singer makes her movie acting debut. The Quincey Jones protégée, who managed to earn her recent three Grammy nominations without an album of her own, says she hasn't planned to try movie acting work this early in her career. However "this part just seemed too perfect for me to resist." She plays a cruise ship singer aboard the liner where Sazara Bullock and Jason Patric run into runaway motor trouble. "My character keeps having close calls and almost dying. At one point I don't have any makeup on at all and my hair is just crazy. I was ready to beg, 'Can't I have some lip balm? Anything.'" She cheerfully goes on, "I'm wearing a sequined dress ... pretending I'm about to die, and I have my legs crossed. We know in real life, that would not happen." She says she does "some little stunts" in "Speed2." And "I do the whole movie with high heels on, which is a stunt in itself." The way things look now, Tania will be seen singing an original tune in "Speed2," a tune that will also be featured on the soundtrack.

Rock n' roll original Little Richard, recently honored with a lifetime achievement award at the American Music Awards, shows no signs of slowing down at age 64. His hot gigs of late include a Superdome Mardi Gras appearance and a guesting on "Muppets Tonight!" He's also contemplating a trip to England where his "I Feel Pretty," from the recent "West Side Story" all-star album, is being released as a single.

Country star Dwight Yoakam reveals that he completed an album of cover songs a year ago—and has been holding it back from release because it may wind up "loosely attached to, and part of, a film Billy Bob Thornton and I would produce together." Yoakam plays the villain—a failed rock musician-turned-abusive alcoholic—in Thornton's critically-acclaimed "Sling Blade" movie. Working on the yet-untilled second Thornton project will be his priority, if the pieces of the production all come together as he hopes. If they don't, his cover collection will come out anyway. "The album definitely stands on its own, intact," Yoakam completed a Christmas album, for release next Christmas, over the holidays. Other than that, his mind has been focused on acting. He's been inundated with scripts thanks to "Sling Blade." He says, "I toyed with the idea of pursuing an acting career before I focused solely on my music. And I always felt I would come back to it some day."

Japan revs up train for Olympics

By Mary Jordan

ABOARD THE ASAMA BULLET TRAIN, Japan—When Jeremy Peterson sat in her spacious, reclining seat on this train racing 168 mph toward Nagano, site of the upcoming Winter Olympics, she thought there was only one thing missing: the ground.

"In most trains, you feel you have a connection to the ground. You feel the jolts, the bumps," said the New York actress and dancer, mimicking the fits and starts of the New York City subway. "The highest difference with this train is that you feel movement, but you don't feel the ground."

More than 2 million visitors are expected to flood Nagano when the Olympic torch is lit in February. Many will be arriving from Tokyo on this sleek blue-and-white train with a red stripe.

Riding the Asama bullet train is more like being on a plane than a train. Seats are soft and wide, and passengers have more legroom than in the first-class cabin of a jumbo jet. Between cars, there are vending machines and telephones. Uniformed women patrol the wide, carpeted aisles with carts of boxed lunches, sandwiches, beer, soda, snacks, ice cream and whiskey.

The Asama races from Tokyo to Nagano, about 120

miles, in 79 minutes. Before the Asama opened last month, the rail trip took three hours. In part because of the expense of tunneling through mountains on the way to the Japan Alps, the new train and tracks cost \$7 billion—\$69 million for every minute shaved off the trip.

The United States' only high-speed rail, Amtrak's Metroliner between New York and Washington, has a top speed of 125 mph. But it rides on bumpy tracks that rattle coffee cups and computers. The Asama No. 3's ride is silent and smooth as glass. A computerized system in the tracks can sense earthquakes and immediately shut down the train in the event of a strong tremor.

It is so unusual for the bullet trains to be even a few minutes late that an electrical problem this week on the Nagano line was huge news. The railway issues partial refunds to passengers if the train arrives late. Those who bought the \$66 one-way ticket from Tokyo to Nagano and arrived two hours later than scheduled this week were refunded \$34.

The Asama bullet train carries 26,000 passengers a day, and that number is expected at least to double for the Olympics. Even the massive public debt accumulated by the ever-expanding rail system does not seem to tarnish the public's love of its safe, graffiti-free, convenient trains. The Seagull,

a 2-year-old unmanned train that runs over Rainbow Bridge at the Tokyo Bay waterfront, is a favorite destination for young couples. They make an evening out of riding the train back and forth over the bay, holding hands and looking out the windows.

But the Shinkansen, as the bullet is known in Japanese, is the king. The opening of the first line, used for the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, was considered so significant it is included in school history texts. In 1991, Japan promised it would produce a better bullet train if Nagano became the site of the '98 Games.

The world's fastest train, France's TGV, speeds along at 187 mph, nearly 20 mph faster than Japan's bullet train. After making his first bullet train trip here this week, James Spears, a Washington lawyer who has ridden both said the main difference is the TGV "goes so fast you get sick looking out the window."

Tokyo Station, the hub of all bullet trains, is where many Olympic visitors will encounter the world's most crowded train system.

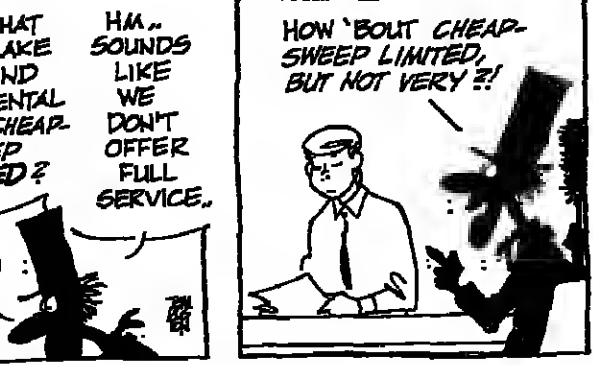
Tokyo Station is like a small city. It is filled with clothes shops, sushi restaurants and barber shops. It has a lost-and-found office that collects an average of 310 new items a day, including wads of cash turned in by the incredibly honest Japanese.

"I would advise visitors not to go there during rush hour, and I mean it," said Peterson, the American actress. While visiting as a tourist last week, Peterson found herself on a busy commuter train with a man who was sleeping standing up, propped up by the packed crowd.

PERKY & BEANZ by Russell Myers



ELWOOD by Ben Templeton & Tom Forman



LA Times-Washington Post News Service

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Jordan in the age of cybernatics

Development and future challenges

By Osama El-Sherif

WHEN WE talk about the information revolution, the distinguishing feature of the last two decades of the 20th century, we are talking about empowering the common man by giving him the choice and the means to receive and distribute information. Such emancipation, unprecedented in man's history, could not have taken place without the rapid evolution of what we call today the Information Technology (IT). It is now possible to store, retrieve, deliver, manipulate and disseminate information at a low cost.

Billions of information bits are constantly exchanged by telephone lines, satellite transmitters, cellular phones, computers, microwave links, Internet nodes and new forms of digital communication. The computer embodies this digital age, but the arrival of the Internet, a gigantic network connecting millions of computers around the world, has brought a new meaning to the information revolution. A computer and a telephone line is all that one needs to surf the Internet.

Billions of dollars are being spent by IT companies to develop powerful interactive multi-media, allowing for hundreds of megabytes of information. New generations of powerful micro-chips will create faster computers and will make it possible to increase the storing capacity of new media, like DVDs or digital video disks which will allow feature films to be stored and played on one's PC.

Today we live in a wired world where hundreds of communication satellites makes it possible to send live images from the battlefield, initiate voice calls to and from remote places and conduct video conferencing at schools, hospitals, banks and other places of business. It is a world that is communicating, selling and buying and getting entertained through a new dimension called cyberspace where a virtual world, unaffected by man's physical limitations, with cybercities, cyberbanks, cyberconferences among others is evolving.

Jordan and the information revolution

Jordan is no stranger to the information revolution. Satellite dishes perch on our rooftops. Cellular phones, computer networks and Internet connections are being used by thousands of Jordanians every day.

Jordan was among the first Middle Eastern countries to allow private companies to offer on-line Internet connections. Today there are at least five Internet Service Providers (ISP). Jordan is doing well compared to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, for example. Direct Internet service is not allowed in Saudi Arabia, while a special security permit is needed to operate a fax machine in Syria.

Jordanian publishers have made use of the opportunities offered by the information revolution. Most newspapers now have electronic or on-line editions on the

worldwide web (*The Star* newspaper being the first to do so in November 1995). Through these, publishers reach readers anywhere in the world.

Many Jordanian companies now have their own web sites and communicate freely with the business partners in the US, Europe and Asia through e-mail.

Adapting to the realities of the new virtual world has been unusually smooth in Jordan—than say France where e-mail and Internet publishing is still a novelty—that today the Jordan Public Intelligence Directorate (AI Mukhabarat) publishes its own web site, while Her Majesty Queen Noor talks about local development projects on her own web page.

Democracy's direct contribution

Why has Jordan been so adaptive to the Information Technology compared to others in the region?

Without the democratic changes and economic reforms that took place in this country in 1989, most of the aspects of the information revolution would not have happened.

Democratization meant a change in public mentality and in official perception of the way the information revolution should be handled. Whether this tolerance was planned or not, the political leadership is to be thanked for removing obstacles on the way of embracing new developments on the information revolution front.

Until 1989, it was almost impossible to operate, or even import, a modem without having first received the approval of the security authorities and the TCC.

Without the economic reforms, that underlined the need to privatize public companies including the TCC, the government would never have allowed private ventures to provide telecommunication services such as Internet connection and cellular phones.

The liberal mood also allowed ambitious ventures to prosper such as PBB's or Public Bulletin Boards where hundreds of home and office users could log in into an electronic bulletin board and exchange information. All that was needed was a computer, a modem and a telephone line.

On these bulletin boards Jordanians were free to discuss the peace process, relations with Israel, press freedom and religious and even sexual issues.

Jordan is among the few countries in the region today where people can browse the Internet without having first to go through firewalls, proxy servers and other filters.

Some people might even think that the lack of official regulation and proper legislation is a dangerous drawback. In the United States, the world's IT innovator, debate has reached the US Congress on

whether to censor the Internet and ban pornography on the system. Such a debate has not evolved in Jordan yet, although it is an issue in Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Since anyone can publish on the Internet, security-conscious countries are not only fearful of the Internet's social effects but of its political influence as well. Where else but on the Internet can one visit the sites of Mexican rebels, Saudi

still keeping the lid on the circumstances surrounding the assassination attempt on Hamas political leader Khaled Misha'i more than a month ago. Jordanians were following the details of the botched operation in the radio, terrestrial TV stations, satellite receivers.

Positive influences on Jordan

The lenient approach to adopting facets

quick and smooth adoption of IT solutions and services have also allowed for ambitious pan-Arab and indeed international IT projects to take place in Jordan. Arab investors chose Jordan as a base for the editorial offices for ArabiaOnLine (Arabia.com) which is the first and only Internet-based news and business service dedicated entirely to the Arab world. Amman is also the base for the editorial offices of *BYTE Middle East*, the leading pan-Arab IT magazine.

Not all is good news!

But while the information revolution has empowered many Jordanians, there are certain inescapable realities.

Jordan remains a developing country struggling in a region that is anguished by the absence of peace, economic growth and stability.

While we talk about cellular phones, Internet connections and satellite dishes, we also have to remember that Jordan's priority is to provide its people with clean water, better schooling, medical treatment, jobs and improved standards of living.

Being part of the global village does not give equal ranking to other residents of the wired community of nations.

Even in the virtual world there are those who have and those who have not. The classical challenges of fighting poverty, ignorance, bigotry, corruption and extremism do not get away as one joins the information superhighway.

Empowerment, though access to information, does not cancel the need for an intrinsic value system to create a balance in information exchange. The medium could easily become the message and our infatuation with all that's new in the IT world could very well turn into a costly and unnecessary addiction.

Most of our scholars and students have no access to the Internet, and computers. We are still years away from providing a telephone line to every citizen that needs one or from making on-line shopping for instance, or electronic business a daily reality. Sometimes the challenge is not in transferring and adopting the technology as such, but in keeping up with the legislative requirements, without which, chaos could creep in.

However, being on the information superhighway helps journalists, students, researchers and scholars in access information that would have been difficult and costly few years ago.

But what about the free flow of dangerous material such as sex and pornography, devil worship, sedition and others? How should we deal with this cultural challenge as officials, legislators and communicators? There is no easy answer, but the information technology is providing us

with some clues and solutions, such as firewalls and software filters, encoders and others. We are lucky, at least, that these ethical challenges are being addressed not only in countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, but also in Canada, France and Germany.

Questions about who really controls the Internet and whether it's a manifestation of western, particularly American, culture and superiority are heard every now and then in the far corners of the world. There are no direct answers—we know that in France, for example, the Internet is seen as a threat to French language and culture.

Another misgiving in Jordan is that newspapers have failed in developing substance. Our newspapers have not invested in the Jordanian editor or the Jordanian reporter as much as they invested in faster and more powerful printing presses. The same is said about the official media, where Jordan's satellite channel is one of the least interesting among competing channels. While we have improved in the delivery system, we have failed in the content area. The web site of the official news agency Petra is one of the weakest and least updated.

We should stop to ask ourselves about our own contribution to the on-going information revolution. Are we basically consumers just as we are consumers of foreign cars, imported food and clothes?

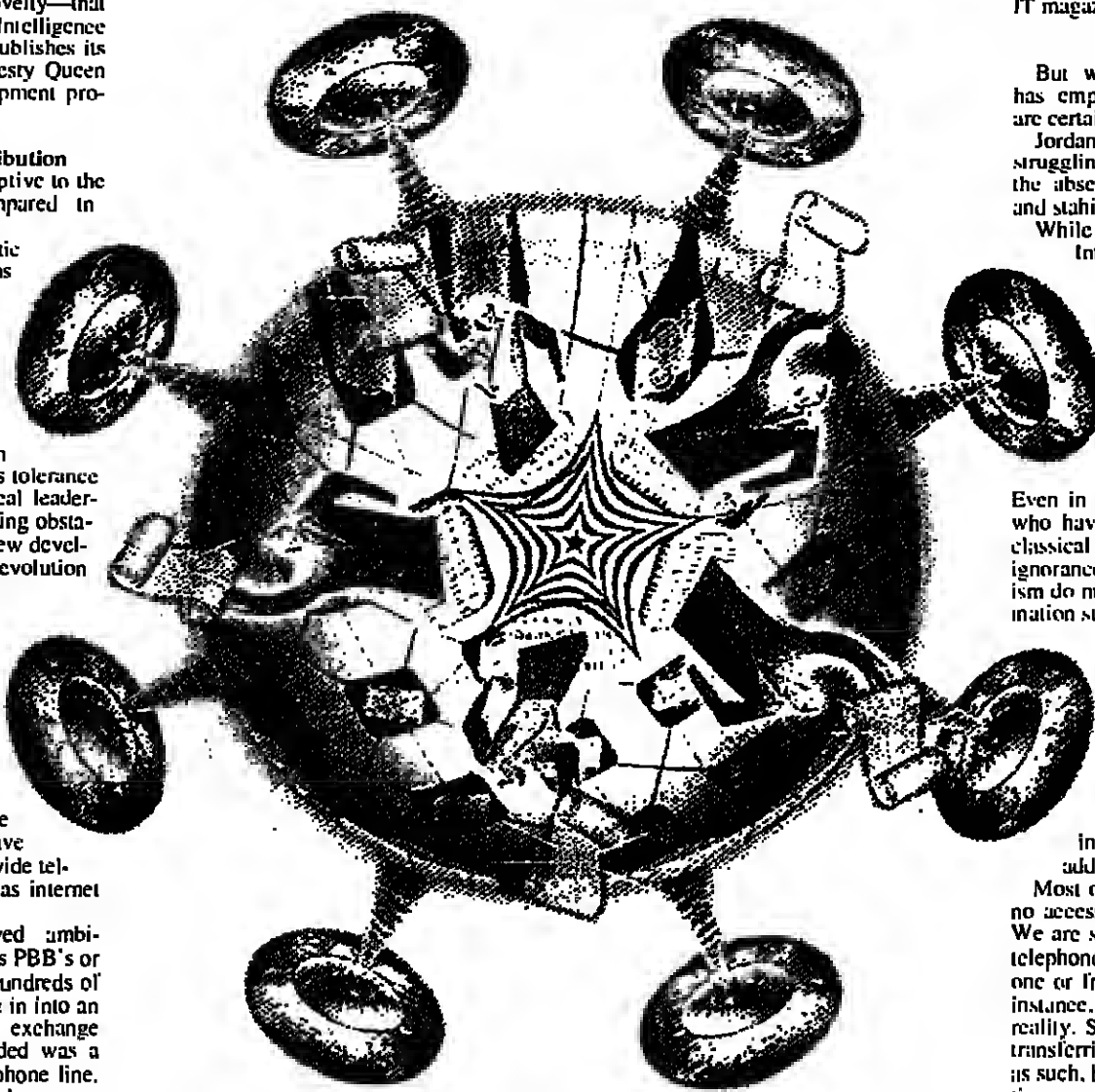
Privately many Jordanians are making their own modest provisions, but at government level there has been a total disregard or apathy to what the information revolution has achieved. Could this apathy be the reason for the unexpected tolerance towards the advent of the Internet, the satellite dish and others into Jordan?

Regardless of the reason, one would find little official information on Jordan by Jordanians on the Internet. None of the government ministries, as far as I know, has its own web site and few ministries bother to check their e-mail accounts, if they have any.

This is in contrast to Egypt, the UAE, Oman and Kuwait whose ministries and official government bodies have invested millions in web sites in order to educate, inform and attract investors.

It is indeed worrying for me that since the flourishing of aspects of the information technology in Jordan was directly linked to the democratic reforms, since 1989, the current regression in these reforms may signal unilateral revisions of what has been hitherto a liberal attitude towards the information revolution.

This is an abridged version of a longer article given to the conference on the "Media and Press in Jordan," held in Amman last month. The writer is the chief editor and publisher of The Star.



dissidents, Iranian monarchists, Kurdish opposition groups, Kashmiri secessionists and Irish militants—all in one short session?

The government in Jordan can still confiscate today's issue of *Al Hayat* newspaper, but those who want to read it can still do so through the Internet. The information revolution has made it virtually impossible to monopolize or regulate the truth.

When the official Jordanian media was

of the information revolution have had a positive impact. Easy access, whether through satellite TV, the e-mail or the Internet has given Jordanians everywhere a chance that they had not before.

Alan newspapers sought to improve their news and picture services and most are now connected to the best sources of news and graphics through their own satellite receivers or leased lines.

The investment in Jordan's telecommu-

Portrait of the artist as an egoist

THE SHAMEFUL LIFE OF SALVADOR DALI, by Ian Gibson, Faber £30, 764 pages

Reviewed by Peter Aspden

When living in an age that not only tolerates, but champions, the opaque arts of self-promotion and the shameless drive of egos that trample all before them, it is easy to take Salvador Dali for granted. But the slim, striking figure that set foot in America for the first time in the autumn of 1934 caused an unprecedented impact on waiting headline-writers. The "Super-Realist Who Paints His Nightmares, While Mortals Grow Dizzy", fleeing the incipient civil war in his native Spain to peddle his cheap brand of bombast and outrage in a new audience, was an instant hit with New York's thirsty sophisticates.

But Dali had been preparing for his moment not only in the days beforehand, when he distributed a broadsheet, "New York Salutes Me", which announced his role as the John the Baptist of the Surrealist movement; but since the age of 16, when he first informed his diary of his future plans: "Perhaps I'll be despised and misunderstood, but I'll be a genius, a great genius, I'm certain of it."

Ian Gibson, in this fine, scrupulous biography, is equally certain that the artist failed to fulfil his adolescent aspiration. Gibson ennobles that at Dal's peak, between 1926 and 1938, he produced startling images of mental unbalance and sexual alienation which indelibly marked the 20th-century sensibility.

But in Dal's ranting exhibitionism and protean nature, he finds an artist who falls some way short of his self-proclaimed genius. Gibson argues his case most persuasively: about halfway through this hefty tome, there comes a point when the artist's quips and oddities suddenly fail to have their required effect, and one is left reluctantly sympathising with Clive Bell's cursory dismissal of the artist's first London show: "If I must be bored with had jokes and bad drawing, give me Punch".

Bell's judgment was too harsh. Dal's jokes may have been questionable, but his draughtsmanship and technique, if anything underappreciated by Gibson, were of the highest order. Gibson's thesis is that it was the artist's sense of shame, something which he never succeeded in casting off, which both inspired and limited his imagi-

native flights. There was indeed something pathetic about the older Dal, in particular, still reworking his sexual anxieties a terror of intercourse and gleeful championing of masturbation in his repetitive painting.

Gibson laudably avoids the temptation to speculate without foundation over some of Dal's most fascinating relationships, namely the triangle formed by his early friendships with Luis Bunuel and Federico Garcia Lorca, and the extraordinary marriage to his muse, Gala. He reluctantly confesses that there is insufficient documentation to assess the impact of these with confidence, though there is enough to condemn Gala as a cold, cruel partner who nevertheless played a key role in Dal's rise to fame.

Bunuel was one of many colleagues from Dal's most fertile period who eventually fell out with the painter. The film-maker asked his erstwhile friend for a loan at the beginning of the war, only to receive an outright refusal in a typically effusive letter which exalted the virtues of de Sade, Spanish domination of the world and explosive gristles. Bunuel failed to see the joke: he never forgave Dal, and carried the letter in his wallet for years afterwards.

There is sympathy too for Andre Breton, who had begun as early as 1934 to find some of Dal's opinions such as the claim that he preferred train accidents in which the third-class passengers suffered most two offensive even for the distorted moral universe of Surrealism.

The relationship with Lorca, Gibson's previous biographical subject, was more complex. Gibson contends that the painter never hurt the poet, and more particularly the role dedicated to him, and that it was his tragedy that he did not cherish him sufficiently "until it was too late". Here, too,

there was sexual dysfunction: Lorca's attempts to seduce Dal only drove the painter more deeply into his narcissistic world.

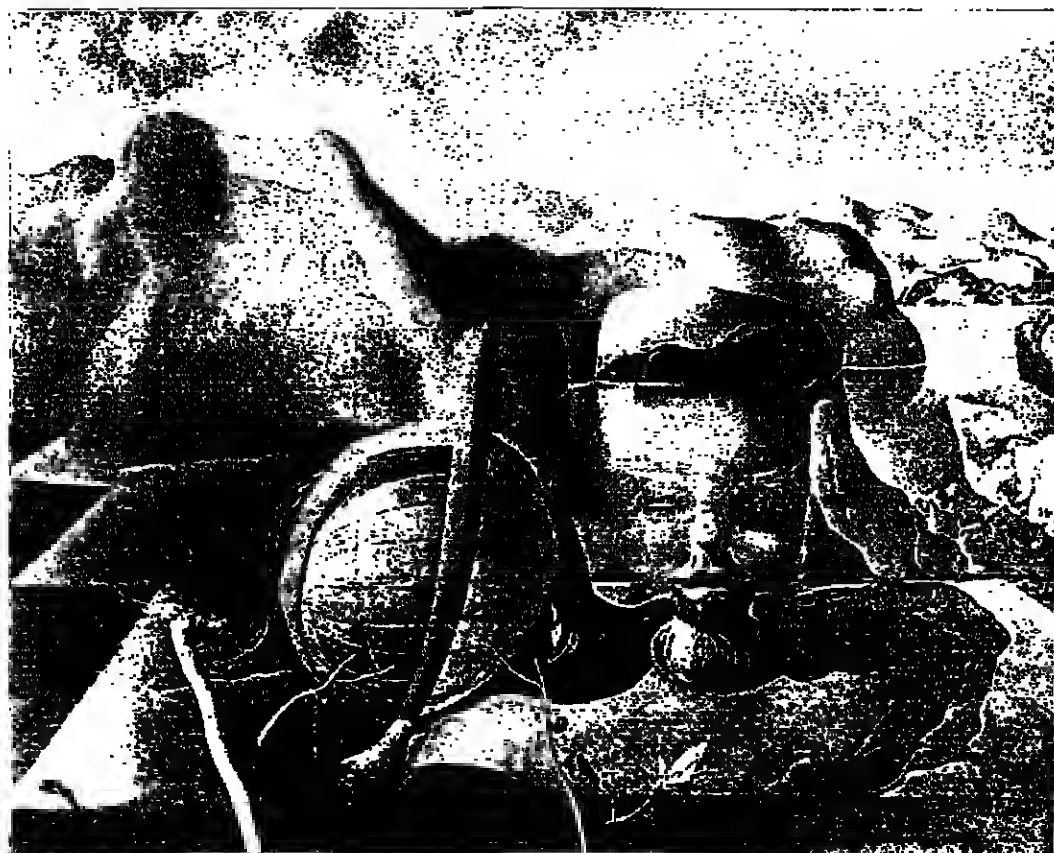
If self-indulgence was the key to Dal's sexual personality, he was scarcely less wilful in his treatment of political and religious subjects. Early flirtations with Marxism were doomed, fellow travellers realised, when he called on workers to "return to the pristine sources of crime, exhibitionism and masturbation", an agenda which more accurately reflected Dal's own obsessions than the causes of the revolution.

Catholicism was first mocked, then embraced. There were attractions for fascism, and an opportunistic wait-and-see stance on the Spanish civil war. As late as 1975, following Franco's last executions, Dal paid fulsome tribute to the Generalissimo and demanded the "liquidation" of all terrorists and many more executions.

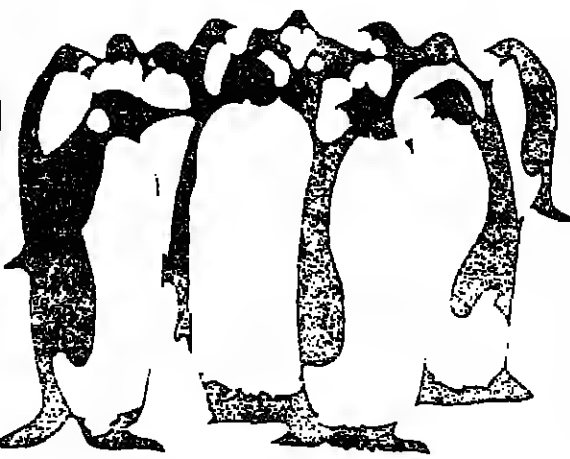
But by this time, Dal's shocking pronouncements were growing stale; he was less witty, and the world had moved on, having become accustomed to self-publicists and their crass outrage. Curiously, towards the end of his life, people who came into contact with Dal began to behave in bizarre ways: there was the reaction of King Juan Carlos, who responded to the death of Gala in 1982 by creating her husband Marquis of Puñal, as if in Surrealist tribute to the remarkable couple. Dal, who had always revered the aristocracy, demanded that the title include his name, and was granted his request.

This ultimate, bland co-optation of the man who had created the iconography of 20th-century paranoia and alienation said everything: the world had finally caught up with Salvador Dal.

Financial Times Syndication



ROUND OWN



A Beaujolais evening

● Air France held its annual reception of Beaujolais Nouveau 97, at Forte Grand Amman/Le Meridien on 25 November 97. Air France in co-operation with Forte Grand Amman/Le Meridien and the French Embassy in Amman hosted this reception in honor of its frequent flyers, customers, its top agents and French companies in Jordan.



Pakistani fashion introduces mysteries of the east to Jordanians

By Areeb de Maio
Special to The Star

The last of a series of events organized this autumn by the Pakistani Embassy on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Independence, concluded with a jewelry show of clothes and jewelry at the residence of the Pakistani Ambassador in Amman, Mr. Saied Ali Sarwar Naqvi and his spouse Mrs. Meher Naqvi, a few days before their departure. The exhibit, titled "Fashion from Pakistan," is the last of the numerous activities carried out as the personal initiative of Mrs. Naqvi during her fabulous three-year stay in Jordan.

Designers Sultana Ahmed and Nishat Hamid, two very good friends of Mrs. Naqvi, brought to Amman 55 items of Pakistani clothing, while artist Amin Gulgee showed his own collection of jewelry-like mini-sculptures. The show was complementary to his ongoing exhibition that is on display now at the National Art Gallery in Jabal Lwethbeh.

Local "ethnic and traditional" than expected, the collection of dresses, wrap-around skirts, necklaces, shawl-pinnacles and hairpins proposed by the two Pakistani fashion designers reflect the new living style of women and their demand for simpler and more comfortable clothes. "We design practical clothes, but we use traditional fabrics and old embroidery techniques," Mrs. Ahmed pointed out.

Made in pure silk, be it "organza" (thick silk), silk velvet or "jamawar" (handwoven silk fabric), all items are decorated with handmade Pakistani embroidery. "The needle work is executed by craftsmen with tens of years of experience," she said. "Unfortunately, traditional embroidery is a dying art nowadays. Affecting eye-sight and financially not rewarding, it is being abandoned by the younger generation who go into more lucrative professions," she explained. Although she is convinced that this tradition could be preserved only with the help of the government, Mrs. Ahmed and her colleague encourage handmade embroidery at a private level by introducing it in all of their export collections.

"Although for the last 10 years, fashion-designing has been rather a hobby than a career to us," Mrs. Hamid added, "now we can call it a rolling business." Based in Pakistan, they make collections to order and send them especially in the United States and Saudi Arabia. "Our elaborate items are very popular in Saudi Arabia," Mrs. Ahmed said. "The clothes we regularly make for occasions sell very well in this country, where every day seems to be an occasion," she continued, unfolding a ravishing rust-colored evening dress abundantly decorated with pearls and sequins.

"The collection we brought to Jordan was created in order to satisfy a more Europeanized taste," Mrs. Hamid said. "As we did not know too much about the expectations of the Jordanian ladies, we have resorted, for this first visit, to various fashion designs of Islamic, Greek-Roman and English inspiration," she explained. "We also chose less striking colors than those we use for Saudi Arabian orders, for instance, and we did away with bold golden ornaments."

She added, "The prevailing colors of the current exhibition are copper

and rust browns and sober blacks. The refined thread work, with delicate traditional patterns and techniques that go back to the time when young girls took hours of years to decorate their wedding dresses. They started to decorate them at a very early age, at the time of 10 and completed the work only four or five years later," evoked Mrs. Ahmed. Another very traditional element present in the collection is the famous "paisley" motif, which was originally inspired by the mango fruit, and then introduced by the British into Western textile industry.

The combination of Eastern and Western patterns of traditional and modern motifs appealed to the eye and taste of the Jordanian ladies who attended the event. "The public seems responsive," commented Mrs. Hamid, adding that if one day they come back to Jordan they will probably bring mini-skirts too.

As for Amin Gulgee's jewelry, the modern is an extension of the traditional one. Primarily a sculptor, sometimes he feels the urge to work on small pieces. What results is sort of "touchable" and "wearable" sculptures that convert tradition into innovation.

Amin Gulgee applies the old Mughal techniques of jewelry-making and stone-mounting to completely new materials like bronze and computer chips. "I am the first one to come up with bronze jewelry in Pakistan, and that is quite surprising to the people as they think that jewelry is obligatorily made of gold or silver," he said. "I am interested in being contemporary," he stressed, touching the inscribed pendant hung



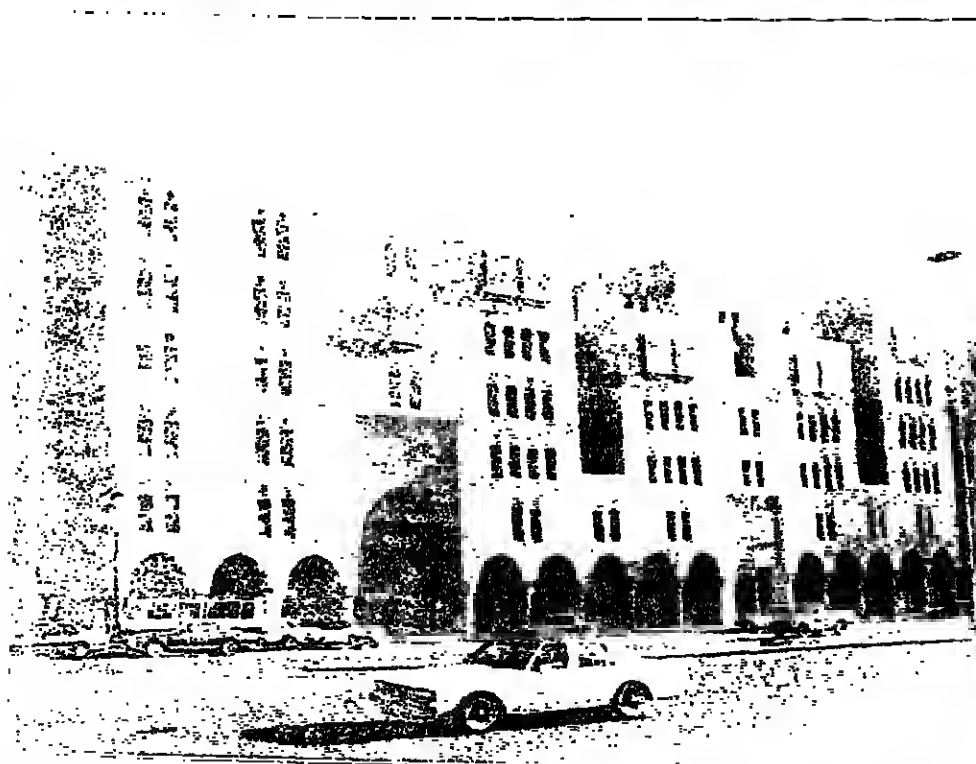
around his neck. "Be it to play with the new and the old and to show that they actually belong to one," he continued.

The young artist, 32, keeps experimenting and bringing old motifs into innovating structures. Academically educated in the history of art, he is fascinated by ancient civilizations. Many of the artistic elements characteristic of remote epochs come back to life again in his art. The motif of archaic fossilized leaves go back to Alexander the Great's time, while the texture of his "meshes" is inspired by the armor of Medieval knights. The gold-plated bronze nets give the feeling of such a texture. The viewer is encouraged to touch the necklaces, ear-rings and pendants, be they meshes or inscriptions with semi-precious stones or crystal.

Gulgee's visit to Jordan is the starting point of a new collection. "The fantastic Jordanian weaving inspired me. What I want to do now is to introduce the geometric motifs of Jordanian weaving into my jewelry and make it feel like sort of solid clothes," he confessed. "This is why I like to travel: an artist is like a sponge, he is always affected by something new," he added.

The collection displayed at the Pakistani residence is travelling with its designer and will be shown again in London on 8 December. Amin Gulgee's jewelry sells very well both in Pakistan and abroad, as they do not address just one particular type of clientele. "The women that buy my jewelry are independent women between 16 and 60 years old; wearing them is not a question of age," he concluded.

Jordanian architect Jafar Tukan wins Saudi award



A DESIGN for a theology school in Al Madina, Saudi Arabia, designed by Jafar Tukan & Partners and Saudi Associates Abulhail Consulting Engineers won the Al Madina Award for Architecture 1997.

The project consists of a school building, a mosque, a library, a large auditorium, student housing, commercial facilities and a hotel, in addition to all necessary services and parking.

The merits of the design as stated in the award documents were its architectural and functional excellence, total response to climatic and environmental properties of the locale, through a spatial composition inspired by Arab Islamic tradition in contemporary architectural terms.

In 1992, Mr. Tukan won the Arab Architect

Award presented by the Organization of Arab Cities which had also in 1988 awarded his project for SOS Children's Village in Amman, the Arab Project Award. In 1993 Tukan won the World Habitat Award for his project SOS Children's Village in Aqaba. Mr. Tukan has been in practice since 1961 after he received his BA from the American University in Beirut in 1961. Although his main office is now in Amman, he does many consultancy work all over the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates. As well as his many activities, he is a visiting lecturer at the University of Jordan, President of the Jordan Society for Development (Basil Hamida) and member of the Noor Al Hussein's Board of Trustees.

A movie lover's bliss December blockbusters on Orbit

FOUR HUNDRED and fifty movies are premiering in December on the Orbit platform — this translates into 15 brand new movies every day! To help new viewers tap into this treasure-trove of film, Orbit is offering a 50% discount on the standard receiver price for those subscribing to the 24-hour premium movie channel Super Movies or Arabic movie channel Al Oula, including over more TV viewers to discover Orbit's content rich channels and secure the digital receiver at half price.

This discount is applicable for both first time subscribers and existing Orbit subscribers. By selecting either one of Orbit's movie channels in the ample subscription menu choice (call any local Orbit dealer) customers will immediately benefit from a 50% discount on the hardware price.

The movie channel promotion coincides with a new season bringing more premieres than ever on Super Movies — "Batman Returns," "Batman Forever," "The Bodyguard," "Wyatt Earp," "The Fugitive," "Nixon," "Father of the Bride," "Forget Paris," "Frankie" are all part of the long list of blockbusting movies available to Orbit subscribers.

Super Movies brings big Hollywood stars to grace viewers' screens in December. Kicking off the line up on the first day of the month is the action packed thriller "Demolition Man," starring Sylvester Stallone and Wesley Snipes, showing at 2000 GMT. More premieres in line for December include the romantic drama "Up Close and Personal," starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Robert Redford on 4 December at 1800 GMT. Other romantic ingredients make up "Cocktail," on 5 December at 1800 GMT, starring Tom Cruise.

But there's more than just romance on Super Movies this month. Demi Moore and

Michael Douglas confront one another across the boardroom in "Disclosure" on 18 December at 2000 GMT and on the following day (19 December), Sharon Stone teams up with Stallone in "The Specialist" at 2000 GMT.

A star studded cast features in "1492: The Conquest of Paradise," based on the story of Christopher Columbus' voyage of discovery. Gerard Depardieu, Sigourney Weaver and Armand Assante play leading roles in this stunning interpretation of Christopher Columbus' 1492 journey.

Brand new thrillers include "The Big Easy," starring Dennis Quaid, while comedy fans will love "Earth Girls are Easy," premiering 26 December at 1600 GMT, starring Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davis.

Al Oula, Orbit's Arabic language movie channel, prides itself in its classic films which

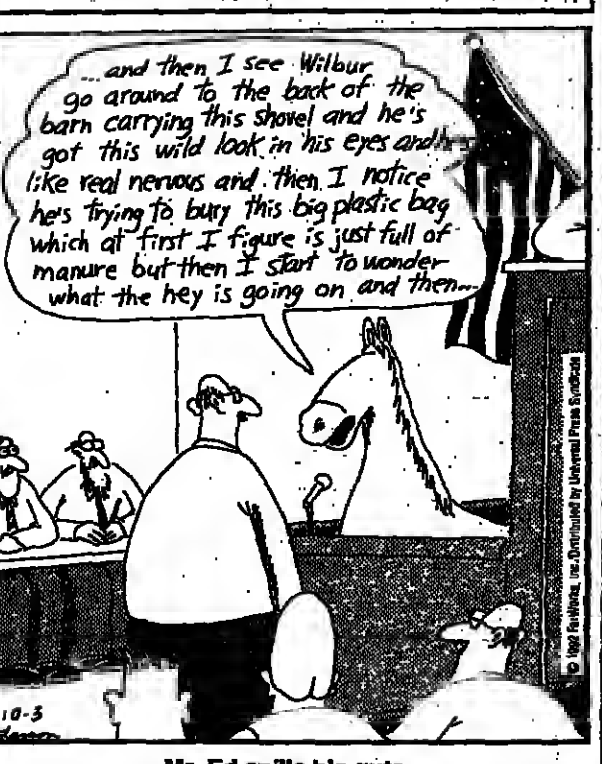
have left a deep imprint in the minds and memories of Arab viewers. Al Oula's production team covers all Arabic and International Film Festivals including Damascus, Cairo, Valencia, and Montpellier. The first Arabic channel to show dubbed international films, Al Oula also features in depth interviews with internationally renowned celebrities. This ultimate Arabic movie channel will be premiering (first-run) films every single day during Ramadan and is poised to broadcast new, dubbed TV drama series.

Among Al Oula's popular and exclusive in-house products is "Mahrajan Taht Al Mijhar" (Festival Under the Spotlight) showing the most important Arab and International Film festivals and "Liqua" at Al Oula (Interviews on Orbit) — a daily interview show which hosts renowned Arab producers, directors and actors, focusing on the latest productions in the Arab world.

Orbit

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



AGENDA

Exhibitions

■ Art Exhibition by the Jordanian Artist Ghada Dahdaleh continues at Baladna Art Gallery till 10 Dec.

■ Magical Weavings, an exhibition of Wall Hangings and Rugs by Bashar Kathem & others at Jordan Rivers Designs end Today 4 Dec.

■ Art Exhibition titled (Journeys Within) by the Pakistani pioneer artist Gulgee and his son the sculptor Amin Gulgee, opens at Jordan National Gallery for Fine Art continues till 15 Dec.

■ Art Exhibition by Khalid Khreis continues at Instituto Cervantes till 8 Dec.

■ Christmas Bazaar — Annual YWCA Christmas classical choir at the Royal Cultural Center continues till 7 Dec.



The Star's TV GUIDE

Programs on JTV from 6-12 December



Amman cinemas

- Galleria I (Tel: 079 33430): Al Maseer (Arabic)
- Galleria II (Tel: 079 33430): Conspiracy
- Philadelphia I (Tel: 634149): The Chamber
- Philadelphia II (Tel: 634149): Beethoven's 2nd
- Plaza (Tel: 699238): Al Maseer (Arabic)
- Concord I (Tel: 677420): Mr Bean
- Concord II (Tel: 677420): Sleep Walkers

ENGLISH PROGRAMS

SATURDAY

- 2:00—Holy Kuran
- 2:10—Twinkle
- 2:30—Muppet Show
- 3:00—The Ultimate Stuntman
- 4:00—Beakman's World
- 4:30—Neighbors
- 5:00—French Programs
- 7:30—News Headlines
- 7:35—Perspective
- 8:00—Perfect Strangers
- 8:30—Prism
- 9:10—Time Trav
- 10:00—News at Ten
- 10:30—Feature Film
- 12:00—Ellen

SUNDAY

- 2:00—Holy Kuran
- 2:10—The Pink Panther
- 2:30—Johnny Quest
- 3:00—Energy Express
- 4:00—American Chart Show
- 4:30—Tarzan
- 6:00—French Programs
- 7:00—News in French
- 7:30—News Headlines
- 7:35—Kate and Allie
- 8:00—Cinema, Cinema
- 8:30—Submarines
- 9:10—Renegade
- 10:00—News at Ten
- 10:30—North & South
- 11:10—The Jewel in the Crown

MONDAY

- 2:00—Holy Kuran
- 2:10—The Show With the Mouse
- 2:30—Hammerman
- 3:00—Gillette Sports Special
- 3:15—Riding High
- 3:30—Animal Show
- 4:00—Oliver Twist
- 4:30—Neighbors
- 5:15—French Programs
- 7:30—News Headlines
- 7:35—Murphy Brown
- 8:00—The Health Show
- 8:30—Babylon 5
- 9:10—Highlander
- 10:00—News at Ten

TUESDAY

- 2:00—Holy Kuran
- 2:10—Sandocan
- 2:30—C.R.O.
- 3:00—Skippy
- 3:30—The Album Show
- 4:30—Square One TV
- 5:15—French Programs
- 7:00—News in French
- 7:30—News Headlines
- 7:35—You Bet Your Life
- 8:00—Skeleton Coast
- 8:30—Encounter
- 9:10—Hollywood
- 10:00—News at Ten
- 10:30—Magaret Volant
- 11:15—Scarlet and Black

WEDNESDAY

- 2:00—Holy Kuran
- 2:10—Johnny Quest
- 2:30—Art Bix Island
- 3:00—Spell Binder
- 4:00—The Munsters Today
- 4:10—Border Town
- 4:30—Neighbors
- 5:00—French Programs
- 7:00—News in French
- 7:30—News Headlines
- 7:35—High Tech Culture
- 8:00—Some One Like Me
- 8:30—Challenges
- 9:10—Kung-Fu
- 10:00—News at Ten
- 10:25—Land's End
- 11:00—American Gothic

THURSDAY

- 2:00—Holy Kuran

- 2:10—The World of Peter Rahi
- 2:30—My Little Fairy Tale
- 3:00—America's Funniest People
- 3:30—He Shoot, He Scores
- 4:00—National Geographic
- 4:30—The Prince and the Pauper
- 5:00—French Programs
- 7:00—News in French
- 7:30—News Headlines
- 7:35—Trivial Pursuit
- 8:00—Parenthood
- 8:30—Lois and Clark (Superman)
- 9:10—Oprah Winfrey Show
- 10:00—News at Ten
- 10:30—Feature Film
- 12:00—Music Show

FRIDAY

- 2:00—Holy Kuran
- 2:10—The Adventure of Teddy Ruxpin
- 2:30—Fred and Barney
- 3:00—Wish Bone
- 3:30—Lucky Luke
- 4:00—Family Matters
- 4:30—Natural Wonders of Europe
- 5:00—French Programs
- 7:00—News in French
- 7:30—News Headlines
- 7:35—Life on the Internet
- 8:00—Are you Being Served
- 8:30—Adventures of Brisco County
- 9:10—Horizon
- 10:00—News at Ten
- 10:30—Best Seller
- 11:30—Feature Film

PROGRAMMES EN FRANÇAIS

- SAMEDI**
5:00—Bêtes pas Bêtes
5:15—Regarde le monde
5:30—Secrets de famille
6:00—La Chine

- 7:00—Le journal
- 7:15—Magazine L'art de l'oubli

DIMANCHE

- 5:00—Mickey Kids
- 5:15—Regarde le monde
- 5:30—Secrets de famille
- 6:00—Magazine Famille
- 7:00—Le journal
- 7:15—Magazine pour tous

LUNDI

- 5:00—Bêtes pas Bêtes
- 5:15—Regarde le monde
- 5:30—Secrets de famille
- 6:00—Théâtre
- 7:00—Le journal
- 7:15—Magazine scientifique

MARDI

- 5:00—Bêtes pas Bêtes
- 5:15—Regarde le monde
- 5:30—Secrets de famille
- 6:00—Savoir plus santé
- 7:00—Le journal
- 7:15—Orient sur Seine

MERCREDI

- 5:00—Mickey Kids
- 5:15—Regarde le monde
- 5:30—Secrets de famille
- 6:00—Théâtre
- 7:00—Le journal
- 7:15—Le N16

JEUDI

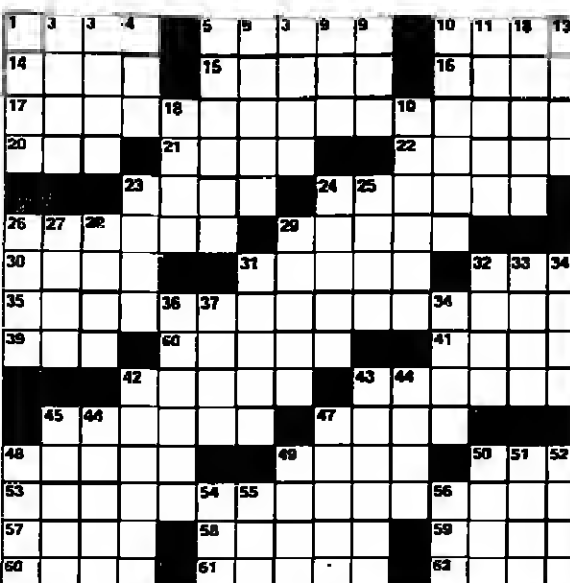
- 5:00—L'invité de marque
- 5:30—L'humour et drôle
- 7:00—Le journal
- 7:15—Le dessin des cartes

VENREDI

- 5:30—Le nouveau jour
- 7:00—Le journal
- 7:15—Magazine

Programs are subject to change by JTV

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



- ACROSS**
1. Feudal slave
 2. Cotton packer
 3. Guess a traffic ticket to
 4. Diva's delight
 5. Run off to
 6. Mother of Pterodactyl and Pteropus
 7. Carry on
 8. Conclude
 9. Star up
 10. Coeur d'
 11. Peel
 12. Bernan
 13. Active art
 14. Road
 15. Shoulders
 16. Prayer word
 17. American diplomat
 18. Skis
 19. Arthur
 20. Carry on
 21. Tomid
- DOWN**
1. Japanese beverage
 2. — go braght
 3. Outer coating
 4. Rage
 5. In the past
 6. Michael
 7. Lounge
 8. Graph or some start
 9. MIL unit
 10. Baron and earl, e.g.
 11. U.S. Vice President
 12. Titan
 13. Wise
 14. Spoken
 15. Tongue
 16. Partner
 17. Pub measure
 18. Folaceous
 19. Florencia
 20. Name in
 21. Ratio of speed to sound
 22. Melville opus
 23. Bowled
 24. Root
 25. Vegetables
 26. Does
 27. Housework
 28. Dobbin's domicile
 29. First name in

EVERYONE WANTS

TO GO TO
HEAVEN,
BUT NO ONE
WANTS TO DIE.



—THIS WEEK'S— HOROSCOPE

By Linda Black

Weekly Tip: Secrets will be revealed, you can count on that. If you've got anything you want to keep confidential, better make sure it's covered up.

Aries (March 21-April 19). Travel looks good, if you can find the money. Your superiors are in a cantankerous mood. No point in arguing. Just do what you're told.

Taurus (April 20-May 20). Money's tight partially because you want to spend too much of it. If you have anything saved up you might be able to take a nice excursion.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). An argumentative person just about drives you crazy. The problem is, he or she is right. The money is available, but there's too much work required.

Cancer (June 22-July 22). You're almost too hasty to have fun. Brief moments will be enjoyable, however. Your partner has all kinds of great ideas. Take notes.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Love blossoms. You'll be having so much fun you may forget to go to work. The job's really tough. Keep at it. It's getting you closer to your dreams.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Your home is the place to be. A very romantic development could occur there. Work together to achieve your dreams.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Use your amazingly brilliant mind to solve a difficult problem. Originality and ingenuity are required.

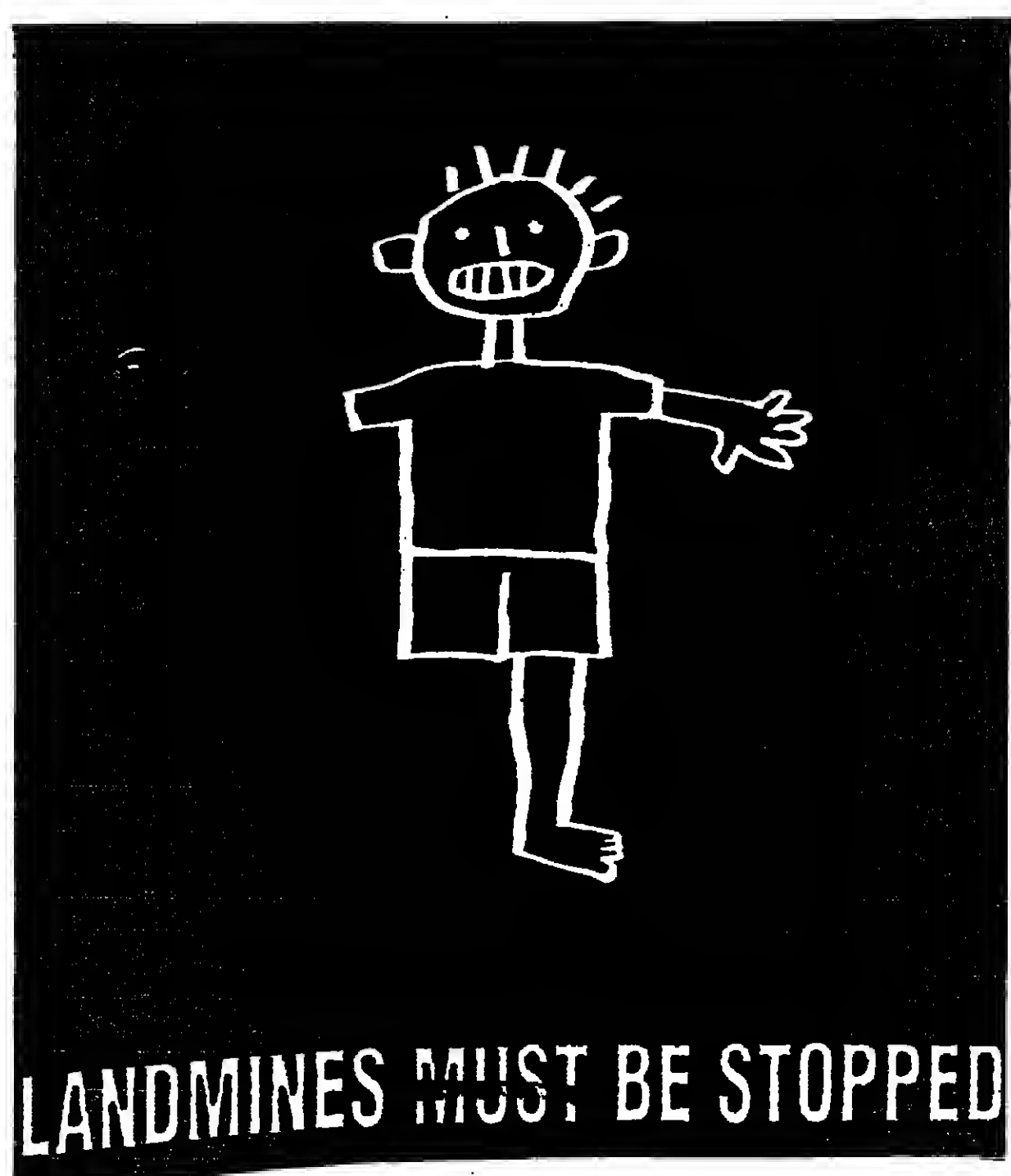
Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Don't ask for money from an older person. You'll just make the situation worse. Practice a tough job to improve your skills. This will come in handy later.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You're lucky. So push your advantage. It should be especially profitable in the areas of romance, but not with an older person.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Finish up old business before somebody nags you. They might think it's funny, but you most likely won't be amused.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You and your friends will have a marvelous time. Impetuous action will work out for the best. If you don't understand the assignment, don't pretend you do.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). Contact with a foreigner could lead to riches. You and your friends can generate even more. It will be fun working together.



LANDMINES MUST BE STOPPED

OTTAWA CONFERENCE
TO BAN ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES
2 - 4 DECEMBER 1997



Abdoun GALLERIA THEATRE

TONIGHT

GALLERIA 1

CONSPIRACY THEORY

3:30 / 6:00 / 8:15 / 10:45

GALLERIA 2

المصير

3:30 / 6:30 / 8:30 / 10:30

Le Jourdain

Supplément en français du Star

Politique

PNC : implosion en vue

Après son échec aux élections législatives, le Parti national constitutionnel semble avoir les pires difficultés à présenter un front uni. Histoire raccourcie d'un parti qui a eu les yeux plus gros que le ventre.

Que se passe-t-il au Parti national constitutionnel (PNC) ? Le jeune parti, né il y a quelques mois, conçu pour être le premier parti du royaume et surtout contre l'influence du Front d'Action Islamique (FAI), souffre déjà de vieillesse : anémie, paralysie, faiblesses et escandales. Les problèmes du PNC ont commencé deux mois avant les dernières élections législatives. Plusieurs membres du parti se sont retirés. Le président lui-même Akel al-Fayez a démissionné en accusant la direction, notamment le secrétaire général Abdul Hadi Majali de «desobéissance».



Le PNC existera-t-il encore pour son congrès prévu en mai 98 ?

Le parti a officiellement présenté 12 candidats aux élections, deux seulement ont fait leur entrée à la Chambre des députés. Un échec cuisant. Aujourd'hui ses dirigeants prétendent compter 17 membres du PNC parmi les députés. Ils ont jugé tous les candidats «juristes», c'est-à-dire ceux qui, durant la campagne électorale, avaient eu leur lien avec le parti pour ne pas perdre les voix tribales. Le PNC avait ainsi réussi à former un bloc parlementaire, baptisé *Al Wafiq* l'Accord, comptant une vingtaine de députés, même si tous n'ont pas la carte du parti. Bref, tout semble aller pour le mieux.

Ambitions

Pourtant, dix jours avant l'inauguration de la session parlementaire, pendant laquelle le président de la Chambre est élu, Abdul Hadi Majali a annoncé qu'il ne serait pas candidat. Le parti qui, il y a quelques mois, avait le soutien tacite de l'appareil d'Etat (il était le seul à bénéficier d'une bonne couverture médiatique à la télévision) paraît aujourd'hui réduit à un

parti comme les autres.

Selon le député Ghazi al-Fayez, un ancien dirigeant démocratique du PNC, celui-ci risque de connaître «des événements dramatiques». «Attendez-vous à l'implosion imminente du parti», n'a-t-il pas hésité à pronostiquer. Autrement dit sont encore à prévoir des démissions massives après l'hémorragie d'avant les élections et très probablement le rétablissement des partis qui avaient fusionné en mars dernier pour constituer le PNC. A cet égard, Anis Mourâcher, ancien secrétaire général d'un de ces partis, vient de signer un article dans un quotidien. Cette reprise de parole après des mois de silence sous la chape de plomb du PNC pourrait être le signe précurseur d'une prochaine scission.

«Non», réplique Hakam Kheir, un des dirigeants du PNC, «notre parti se porte bien et le danger de désagrégation n'existe pas». Il s'attaque ainsi à ceux qui diffusent de «mauvaises informations» sur le PNC. C'est pourtant le même homme qui a reconnu le recul du parti après les élections : «Le processus de fusion n'a pas eu le temps d'aller jusqu'au bout».

ad-il admis en soulignant des «lacunes» entre la direction et la base du parti. Il veut croire cependant que le prochain congrès en mai 98 franchira tous les problèmes : «C'est qui veut changer la direction, qu'ils viennent au congrès», répète-t-il.

Selon les observateurs, les difficultés du parti ne sont pas fortuites : une décision au plus haut niveau du pouvoir aurait été prise pour réduire le PNC. En fait, il a perdu tout intérêt quand les islamistes ont décidé de boycotter le scrutin. Ensuite, il semble qu'on ait reproché à la direction du PNC ses ambitions hégémoniques sur l'appareil d'Etat. Dans un propos tenu en août dernier, Abdul Hadi Majali aurait confié que «si le PNC obtenait 40 sièges ou plus dans la prochaine Chambre, il revendiquerait le droit de former le gouvernement». Autrement dit, il s'agit d'un parti d'opposition. On comprend que de telles velléités aient pu agacer dans les hautes sphères de l'Etat hachémite. ■

Suleiman Sweiss

Entraînement de l'armée israélienne : attention terrain miné !

Grand regret : l'absence de la convention internationale sur l'interdiction des mines antipersonnel. L'Etat juif a pourtant abandonné en 1980 l'usage des explosifs qui font des dizaines de victimes palestiniennes. C'est en tout cas ce qu'affirme l'association israélienne des droits de l'Homme. Depuis le début, voici dix ans de l'Intifada, près de 100 Palestiniens dont 71 enfants ont été des victimes des munitions abandonnées par l'armée israélienne sur des terrains d'entraînement. L'association Betsalem de défense des droits de l'Homme. Vingt-huit personnes ont trouvé la mort et 100 blessées. Les blessures sont souvent graves, indique Noga Kadmon, une enquêtrice de l'association. Les Israéliens s'ignorent reproduisant de jouer les bons élèves à l'occasion de la conférence d'Ottawa qui s'achève aujourd'hui. Mais Israël n'a pas signé ce traité, il sera présent pour faire valoir «son expérience médicale dans le traitement et la réhabilitation de victimes des mines», explique un porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étrangères. Betsalem dénonce néanmoins l'absence de signalisation sur les champs de manœuvres. «Nous disposons de pancartes en trois langues, dont l'arabe, mais les terrains d'entraînement sont très étendus. Il n'est pas possible de les clôturer», répond un porte-parole de l'armée. Celle-ci relève également qu'après chaque entraînement, les soldats sillonnent le champ de manœuvres pour désamorcer d'éventuels explosifs. Pourtant, en février, un Palestinien de 24 ans a été grièvement blessé en promenant son troupeau autour de son village. L'âne qu'il chevauchait a explosé en passant sur une mine. Le berger est aujourd'hui handicapé à plus de 80%.



Les mines antipersonnel font une victime toutes les 20 minutes dans le monde.

Portrait

Fathieh Saoudi ou le combat optimiste

Elle est la présidente-courage de l'association médicale jordano-française qui inaugure aujourd'hui son 5ème congrès à Amman. Il a fallu un «petit tour du monde» à Fathieh Saoudi, la Jordanienne, pour découvrir qui elle était : une révolutionnaire à visage humain.

Son histoire

commence en 1949 à Amman. Elle vit le jour dans une famille qui, comme aujourd'hui, est à la fois traditionnelle et moderne, une de ces familles nombreuses (vingt frères, deux sœurs) où Fathieh était la plus jeune et la plus proche de son père. «J'ai eu une relation très spéciale avec mon père, se souvient-elle. J'étais à ses côtés quand il recevait des visiteurs à la maison et c'est moi qui leur servais le café, ce qui était pour moi une grande responsabilité. Pour d'habitude quelle petite fille d'une famille traditionnelle, être féminine, cela voulait dire perdre sa liberté, alors un jour, Fathieh a compris que ses cheveux pour pouvoir aller jouer dans la rue avec les autres enfants. Plus adolescente, elle renaît de se marier très jeune comme l'une de ses sœurs aînées : elle veut devenir médecin.

son enfance de savoir ce qui se passe dans le corps humain.

C'est aussi en France qu'elle découvre son besoin d'aider les Palestiniens : «À l'époque, je voulais que, parce que j'étais Arabe, je devais connaître la cause palestinienne». En 1977, après avoir terminé son cursus universitaire, elle se rend au Liban avec un groupe de médecins pour travailler dans les camps palestiniens. Elle y reste jusqu'en 1982 et l'invasion israélienne.

L'expérience de Fathieh Saoudi au Liban bouleverse sa vie professionnelle et humaine : «Au Liban, c'était mon premier travail et c'est là-bas que ma philosophie de la vie s'est formée».

Malgré l'invasion israélienne, la jeune femme choisit de rester au Liban. Elle y vit la frustration et les souffrances des femmes et des enfants de la guerre. Elle travaille alors dans un hôpital sans électricité et tente chaque jour de sauver comme elle peut des vies humaines. «J'ai vu des enfants mourir sans que je puisse faire quoi que ce soit parce que c'était insalubre et qu'il n'y avait pas assez de médicaments», témoigne Fathieh, c'est ainsi que la souffrance des femmes et des enfants fuyant leurs maisons sous le bombardement pour aller chercher de l'eau et de la nourriture m'a beaucoup touchée. Fathieh Saoudi.



«Au Liban, la souffrance des femmes et des enfants fuyant leurs maisons sous les bombardements pour aller chercher de l'eau et de la nourriture m'a beaucoup touchée», Fathieh Saoudi.

belle-Beyrouth 82, où elle raconte son expérience : «Ce livre a représenté un soulagement pour moi car ce que j'avais vécu m'avait beaucoup épuisé».

«Protéger le rêve»

Après le Liban, Fathieh retourne en Jordanie qu'elle retrouve après plus de douze ans d'absence. Elle apprend à redécouvrir un pays qui a beaucoup changé depuis son adolescence.

en 1990 avant d'être recrutée sur le sol du régime syrien, une quarantaine de médecins jordaniens, diplômés en France, maintiennent des relations privilégiées avec le secteur médical de l'Organisation mondiale de la Santé.

Malgré ses nombreuses activités, Fathieh Saoudi a toujours poursuivi son engagement de militante pour les causes qui lui tiennent à cœur : la paix et le bonheur des femmes. L'Arabie saoudite, la guerre du Golfe, le Canada, le Liban pour dénoncer la massacre de 1995. Il y a deux mois elle a reçu de la France la médaille de Chevalière de l'Ordre du mérite national, une récompense qui lui a beaucoup marqué : «Pour la première fois j'ai senti que quelqu'un appréciait ce que j'avais fait dans ma vie».

Malgré tous ses succès, la guerre, Fathieh Saoudi, le médecin, l'avocate d'urgence humanitaire, reste profondément gaie et optimiste : «En pensant que demain sera meilleur, je veux protéger le rêve».

Samia Abu Sharrar

●Fathieh Saoudi : «Pour moi, l'écriture est une autre façon de servir les autres». Elle a publié :

- *La santé de l'enfant. Le guide pour la maman*, 1990, en arabe.
- *L'Ombre rebelle-Beyrouth 82*, 1985, en français.
- *Les conditions sociales et sanitaires des Palestiniens au Liban*, 1979, en français et en arabe.
- *Le 5ème congrès de l'association médicale jordano-française se tiendra aujourd'hui et demain au Centre culturel royal. Thème principal : «Les soins de santé primaire : présent et avenir».*

C'est la vie

L'agenda culturel d'Amman

Conférence

Au cours de cette conférence-débat, Jacques de Maio, directeur du CICR à Amman, vous convie à mieux comprendre le rôle de la Croix Rouge dans la région mais aussi comprendre la terrible actualité humanitaire. Fondée en 1863 par Henri Dunant, la Croix Rouge assure depuis plus d'un siècle l'assistance aux blessés de guerre ou d'une manière plus large tous les traumatismes de la guerre. Politiquement neutre, elle est présente partout dans le monde. Lundi 8 décembre à 18h30 au Centre culturel Français. Renseignements au 637009/636445.

Exposition

Où l'on redécouvre le parcours artistique d'Ammar Khammash, le designer qui habille les intérieurs privés et publics jordaniens. Jusqu'au 12 décembre au CCF.

Cinéma-Spécial BD

Tintin et l'affaire Tournesol (voir photo). Dessin animé, couleurs, non sous-titré. Tintin et le capitaine Haddock réussiront-ils à retrouver le professeur Tournesol ? Lundi 8 décembre à 18h00 et 20h30 au CCF.



Nouvelles du Pays

Enfance

Passeport pour la lecture

La journée mondiale de l'enfance est prévue le 14 décembre prochain. A cette occasion, le Jourdain vous propose de découvrir une association jordannienne qui travaille sur la lecture des enfants dans les zones les plus défavorisées d'Amman.

L'association des amis des enfants a été créée deux ans avant le deuxième exil palestinien en Jordanie en 1967. Son objectif : soutenir les

familles et l'école dans l'éducation des enfants. Elle réalise sa première grande action en créant une bibliothèque dans le bâtiment de la municipalité d'Amman : 200 livres

sont alors placés dans les rayons. L'idée a plu aux enfants qui viennent de plus en plus nombreux dans ce lieu de lecture. L'association établit donc d'autres centres du même type dans les zones les plus peuplées : sur les sept construits, six se situent dans les camps de réfugiés palestiniens. «A l'école, on nous donnait des recherches à faire mais je n'avais pas les moyens de me payer des livres, c'est pourquoi j'allais souvent à la bibliothèque de l'association qui se situe à côté de chez moi», raconte Fadi, 22 ans, aujourd'hui étudiant à l'université.

L'écriture et le dessin de l'association Rawdah Al Hudud décrit son travail comme «une volonté de plus de 30 ans de réunir les retours culturels, sanitaires et sociaux dans les milieux populaires». Le programme est ambitieux et repose sur une multitude de «petits» services : la fourniture de livres et de revues aux habitants, sur place un service de prêts et de photocopies bon marché, la lecture d'histoires aux petits enfants qui ne savent ni lire ni écrire, l'organisation de soirées de dessin et de musique voire même un soutien en mathématiques et en langues à des prix dérisoires. Mais si l'association des amis des enfants a multiplié

ses activités (conférences, cinéma, expositions...), sa principale activité est concentrée sur le livre. L'an passé, tous les centres ont participé au concours *Passeport pour la lecture* : les enfants devaient lire plusieurs ouvrages dont ils parlaient ensuite devant les différents responsables de l'association, le temps d'un goûter à la municipalité d'Amman.

Aujourd'hui les différentes bibliothèques de l'association comptent plus de 20.000 livres en rayons et plus de 127.000 personnes sont venues les consulter en 1995. ■

Chédid Abdallah



Dans les milieux traditionnels, de nombreuses jeunes filles ne vont pas au bout de leurs études en raison de la pression familiale.

25% quittent l'école avant 16 ans

À première vue, les statistiques sont plutôt encourageantes. Dans le rapport annuel de l'Unicef, 98% des enfants jordaniens sont scolarisés en primaire mais quand arrive le temps du lycée, les choses se gâtent avec 25% de garçons et de filles qui ont quitté l'école avant 16 ans. Les raisons sont diverses : les filles se marient très tôt, doivent aider aux travaux de la maison, sont interdites d'études par leur famille qui respecte la tradition ou refuse de les voir partir étudier loin du foyer ; les

garçons se mettent à travailler très tôt, surtout dans le milieu agricole ou se retrouvent livrés à eux-mêmes à la suite d'un décès, d'un divorce ou d'un long voyage des parents.

Une dizaine d'associations regroupées dans l'Organisation jordannienne des associations de charité travaillent à la protection et à l'éducation de l'enfance. Elles travaillent depuis 1993 en collaboration avec l'Unicef et les autorités locales. ■

C.A.

